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SPOKEN IN ANGER.

SPOKEN IN ANGER.

A Nobel.

"Aye, they ruled him, those fierce passions."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

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SPOKEN IN ANGER.

CHAPTER I.

d  WILL you come with me to the library for a few moments, Captain Stanley?" said Sir Hugh, taking Vivien's arm as he left the breakfast-room. "A shocking bad day, is it not? It was really very good of that poor devil to come. I have ordered Hewit to pack him up some game, out of gratitude, Nina would say, for we were positively dying of *ennui*; but really, now all the hampers are packed, we don't know what to do with the birds. You are all

such good shots, and grouse *have* been plentiful this year ; I don't think we've had such a good season since I've owned the place."

This in his usual pleasant, lazy voice ; but when they were seated in the library, Hugh's cynical, devil-may-care face suddenly became very grave.

" I wish to speak to you on a very delicate subject, Captain Stanley. I believe I am right in saying that you have known Mr. Strafford since his childhood, and that you are related to him in some way ?"

" We are not related ; but had we been brothers, we could scarcely have been more together in our childhood !" Vivien said, smiling at the thought, D'Arcy and he brothers ! Yet, could he have loved a brother better than gentle little D'Arcy ? To be sure, there had come an estrangement between them of late, that had pained

Vivien not a little ; but he with his manhood's health and strength was not likely to remember peevish irritability from D'Arcy.

Then I am not, perhaps, betraying confidence in asking you to acquaint Lord Clowden with his son's recklessness. To my certain knowledge he has lost several thousands lately ; of course it is no business of mine how Mr. Strafford pays these large play debts, but I confess I don't at all like the responsibility of his ruining himself in my house."

"Play debts !" Those two words smote on Vivien's ear like the bitter sting of a personal insult. That was the reading of the riddle that had puzzled him so of late. He would as soon have thought of striking a little child as touching a card for gain—and D'Arcy was a gambler ! Many memories came crowding back of the little,

gentle, fair-haired child, and how once Marion had said, "When I am dying, Vivien, I should like to think I had trusted D'Arcy to you." She had been very near death at the time, and how the soft, pale face came reproachfully back, for *how* had he kept that trust! He had seen daily that some anxiety weighed on D'Arcy's mind, and yet he had never tried to win his confidence; he had stood calmly by, watching the weak spirit go the road to dishonour. It seemed to Vivien that the dishonour was almost his own.

"I wish I had known this before," he said; "do you think there is no hope of his giving up playing?"

"Give up 'Play!'" cried Sir Hugh, with a short laugh. "When a man has gone so far as he has, he'd sell his own soul to the devil rather than miss a single night."

Never touch a card if you value your peace of mind, for when once the Play fiend gets hold of you, it's a very old man of the sea. Why, I've known men gamble on their deathbed. Mr. Strafford will never give up Play while he has a shilling left."

"I must think what can be done!" Vivien said, anxiously. "Unless it is absolutely necessary, I would rather not write to Lord Clowden."

Sir Hugh went back to the billiard-room with a comfortable feeling of having done his duty, and freed himself from a disagreeable responsibility. His anxiety had been thoroughly selfish, for he might easily have checked D'Arcy's gambling from the beginning, instead of leading him on for the idle amusement of seeing "the young one go his paces;" and, indeed, he had taken great pride in him at first; but the

very thought of his pupil being ruined in his house was enough to destroy all interest in him. A scandal of that kind was to be dreaded by a family too well known as reckless gamblers, and whose continual success at cards was almost a proverb. He possessed the comfortable philosophy that can always ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and he was not likely to think twice of the care he had taken to train young Strafford's love of cards, provided it did not lead to any disagreeable exposure; and he would only have arched his brows ever so slightly on hearing that D'Arcy had staked his last shilling elsewhere.

"Play" had never injured him, and if people would be so insane as to carry an innocent amusement too far, they were to blame, surely not the host, who had tried to make his house as pleasant as possible

during the dull August evenings. So he argued; and perhaps Sir Hugh was not more selfish, naturally, than his fellows; but he was a gambler; a man of the world and a cynic, whose whole life had been one long debauch; whose heart had been untouched by sorrow or sentiment, and who had never known an anxiety or a joy that could have roused him from the lethargy of selfishness. Untrained in his youth, undisciplined in his manhood, was it wonderful that middle age should find him a selfish, cynical worldling? Perhaps the only good feeling that ever blossomed in his life he owed to bonnie, good-natured Nina.

Vivien knew very little of Lord Clowden, and that little was not to his credit. In his boyhood he had thought him a brute, leaving his wife without word or sign for

fourteen long years; the gentle, weary face had been very eloquent, though the low voice never complained, and the downward curve of those soft pink lips had sealed a chapter of suffering that even his young heart could understand; and now he wondered if his father was the kind of man to deal wisely or gently with D'Arcy. He had grossly neglected him, in the selfish excess of his passionate grief; for the boy had been entirely on his own hands since Marion's death. With a larger allowance than he at first knew what to do with, with no guide save his own wavering will, unstable as water, weak as a woman, was it wonderful that he gave way beneath a temptation that many a stronger man has easily succumbed to?

There had been ~~no~~ sympathy between Clowden and his son; the weakness that

attracted Vivien's affection was almost repellent to his father's strong-willed, passionate nature. He had become almost brutally impatient in his manners since Marion's death. The very thought of those fourteen wasted years would make him gnash his teeth like a caged wild beast. There was no resignation in that stubborn heathen heart. Marion was lost to him, lost for ever; the sweet fair face had passed away like the sparkle of his youth, or the first soft flush of dawn; and now, in the dark night of his old age, he was friendless and alone! Nothing irritated him so much as D'Arcy's gentle, loving sympathy; the clinging sensitive heart had turned to him for support and comfort in the first horror of their mutual loss, but he had been repulsed with bitter, cynical harshness. The very faith his dead mother had

taught him, when timidly offered as consolation, was treated with all an atheist's contempt; and the boy shrank in fear from the fierce, dark spirit he could so easily rouse, but never lay.

So that when Clowden started on a cruise in his yacht, the *Wild Bird*, D'Arcy was very glad to be left behind. He heard from him often, from all parts of the European coast; notes kind enough, considering the man's saturnine, embittered spirit, but showing no interest, no anxiety. Indeed, Clowden seemed hardly conscious of his responsibility; and I think of all his sins, this selfish neglect was the only one he never acknowledged, not even in the after-time when that son's crime brought the dark flush of shame to his brow.

The afternoon rain had passed away into a fresh, starry evening, and Vivien sat by

the window of his own room, far into midnight, thinking of some plan whereby he might get D'Arcy away from the Lodge without exciting any suspicions in the boy's mind as to his motive; for, like most weak-minded people, D'Arcy could be very obstinate at times—not an honest determination, but a blind, dogged persistency that is very hard to deal with; and Vivien knew that if he guessed his motive for wishing him to leave the Lodge, all the influence he hoped to use for good would be of no avail. Captain Stanley was not good at stratagem; very few honest, open-hearted men are. He would have liked to remonstrate with D'Arcy as an elder brother might, pointing out to him the dishonourable waste of time and fortune gambling was; but he knew that his was no position to exert authority or enforce

advice, so he felt that he must act with caution ; and indeed he took no small credit to himself for this kind of cunning.

A goodly sight was that dark earnest face in the soft half-light. So thought the watcher below. Wrapped in a long dark cloak, crouching in the shadow, knelt the fairest woman in all Scotland, the woman whom many an aching heart had cursed as heartless, herself as madly in love as the maddest of them all ; the proud head bowed at last, and the mocking, insolent face altered almost past recognition by the new soft tenderness of expression.

Julie had felt restless and unhappy that evening ; the long, dull day, with its weary harvest of disappointment, had left a weight on her spirits that action alone could relieve ; she felt that anything would be preferable to lying there, in bitterness of

spirit, vainly courting sleep ; so she had crept downstairs, and, unbarring the low breakfast-room window, passed out ; the fresh beauty of the evening and her aimless wanderings bringing peace to her aching, weary heart.

Never before had the girl tasted the bitterness of unrequited love ; conquest had been so easy, that she looked upon it as her right, and now she battled fiercely with the new sense of utter subjugation that was so miserably creeping over her. She had liked D'Arcy better than most of her adorers, for his gentle, sympathetic disposition ; and the pure-souled, romantic boy had been a new study to this student in human hearts. Besides, worldly ambition had whispered that he was the heir to a wealthy dukedom, and Julie had no objection to eventually binding a coronet on her

low, white, scheming brow. But now all was so different; she would have loved Vivien if he had been a penniless soldier of fortune—loved him with a deep, true, uncalculating woman's love, finding her happiness in the mere fact of his presence. She was now no longer a sovereign accepting homage, and rousing strong, true love at her will, thinking it amply repaid by a few false, sweet smiles, a few exquisite moments of blissful hope, and then the utter desolation of despair. Now *she* herself realised all this; for, humiliating as the confession was, with all the passionate intensity of her nature, she loved this man who had never spoken one word of love to her, and who seemed as unconscious of her warm, bright loveliness as the senseless ground she trod on.

And there she knelt on the damp grass

where she had first sunk down to escape his notice, feeling strangely, madly happy, poor fool, from the very fact that she could see him,—a living picture, her own, and the night's, for those few moments—envying even the cigar he smoked so fiercely in his puzzled thought. She wondered mightily what could bring that anxious shadow to his face. Some absent love perhaps, not so fair as herself; for was she not an acknowledged Belle? Some doll-faced woman, piquant in her pink and white hideousness! Strong, firm men always liked baby women; and Julie clenched her small hand, and hated her fancied rival. The next moment she wailed, "Oh! I could bear a rival even, if you would love me a little, only a little."

And Vivien, utterly unconscious of this piteous appeal, threw away his cigar, and

shut the window ; for there had come into his mind an idea, like an inspiration, so clear a road did it light out of his anxiety. Suppose he took D'Arcy to Boulogne with him ; he had not yet seen his new possessions there, so it would be a good excuse ; and perhaps, safely removed from temptation, cards might lose their fatal power. He rose up with a sigh of relief. There would be no need to write to any one ; he would work out the reformation himself.

Vivien's room was close to D'Arcy's ; so he crossed the corridor, and softly opened the door. He had not seen him all day except at meal-times, for the boy was not among the party in the passage.

Vivien had scarcely given his absence a thought at the time, because both D'Arcy and Colonel Bellingham were only going to the ball as spectators, so of course it was not

incumbent on them to wear fancy dresses. For the Colonel, though several years his brother's junior, was in feeling and appearance a much older man; and while Sir Hugh still held his own with the gallants of the day, his brother was generally gossiping with the chaperons (I wonder why the British veteran is always such a real old tattler?) or watching Julie's graceful movements, and the tact with which she managed her victims.

D'Arcy was lying asleep on a low sofa, fully dressed. The pale, worn face; the crutches resting by the couch on which he lay; the shadowy, wasted hands; appealed to all the tender, kindred love in Vivien's heart, that love the mainspring of which he himself was so unconscious; and he could almost have wept, strong man that he was, at the sight of the wreck before him.

“Poor boy ! poor fellow !” he said, softly. “Worried and tired to death by this folly !”

He took a plaid that lay near, and with a touch light as a woman’s wrapped it carefully round the sleeping man. Ah ! had D’Arcy only trusted from the first, and confessed all to that true loving heart, merciful because it was so strong, I am persuaded all might yet have been well.





CHAPTER II.



ALTHOUGH Vivien had made up his mind to think no more of Julie, he found himself eagerly scanning the gay masquerade crowd for her lithe, graceful figure. He felt he would know her, however cunningly disguised, by the matchless ease that characterised her every movement.

Down the long room, bright with tropical colouring, gay with sunny laughter and the rippling echo of sweet, rich melody, moved that motley crowd of many nations. Here a bacchanal crowned with luscious grapes; there a dandy powdered and curled, in all the vanity of the eighteenth century.

Bright-clad *vivandières*, Tyrol peasantry, turbaned Turks, and French fisherwomen ; while, conspicuous among the moving throng, were the soft folds of the mantilla, matching well the piquant mask, out of which shone eyes bright with the dangerous lustre of excitement and coquetry. But in none of these did the tall Moor recognise Julie.

Surely that was Lady Bellingham's laugh—that vision that glided by him in the Elizabethan ruffle!—none other could ring out such clear, glad harmony. He was just preparing to follow, marking her well by the horned satyr on whose arm she leant, when a tiny gloved hand was laid on his, and a pair of winning eyes looked up at him, fairly glittering with saucy mirth.

“It is not so difficult to recognise one's friends, Captain Stanley.”

There was no mistaking the soft curve of that small piquant chin, nor the mouth that gleamed so redly bright through the jealous lace covering.

"I am quite of your opinion, Miss Bellingham," he laughed, looking down with unfeigned admiration at the radiant little creature before him. Clad in mauvy cloud-coloured tulle, glittering crystal stars covering the soft net drapery, diamonds on the gleaming arms, diamonds blazing fitfully on the slender, rounded throat, zoning the supple waist, and starting into prism light among the wavy, down-flung hair—a sparkling, witching, little "Queen of the Night" Julie made.

"Tra, la, la! tra, la, la!" she cried, beating time to the music. "Is it not beautiful?"

There was a luminous light in her topaz

eyes, for she loved brightness, music, and rich colouring with all the generous warmth of her mother's sunny race; and here she was a child, forgetting for the time that haughty, insolent nonchalance the world had taught her.

"And you have not danced once, Captain Stanley?"

"May I make up for lost time *now*?" he whispered, accepting the challenge in those bright, bewildering eyes.

There are times when a whole lifetime of bliss seems condensed in a few short, thrilling moments—moments that *never* lose their witchery—moments that we can recall vividly, even to the sweet, mad heart-throb, long weary years after, when the dust of other memories lies thick on the grave of the Past. Resting for the first time in Vivien's arms, her bright fair head almost pil-

lowed on his breast, Julie was drinking in the intoxication of such moments as only a voluptuous, passionate heart can. The room swam round a maddening blaze of light; the weird, sweet German air seemed to time her feet to its soft melody; but consciousness was all merged in the perfect bliss of feeling his arm so strongly, restfully round her.

Something of the girl's delirium must have possessed Vivien too; for when they paused she tottered slightly, and as he bent over her the action was almost a caress.

"You are tired, Miss Bellingham; let me find you a seat." And simple as the words were, her heart warmed to the anxious ring of his low rich voice.

"Not here!" she cried; "somewhere in the grounds. This light, this crowd dazzles me!"

Out in the soft bright moonlight they found many like themselves who had wandered away from the close crowded ball-room; but they walked silently on, Julie cared not where; it was enough just then to lean giddily, wearily, happy on his arm, till at last they came to a tiny arbour in so remote a part of the grounds that even the glad laughter of the masqueraders failed to reach them.

"We are quite snug here, and may unmask with safety," Julie said, uncovering her fair bright face, and looking doubly winning in the subtle languor of her attitude, that if feigned was a masterpiece of coquetry.

"Do you think, Captain Stanley, that I should get very wet if I tried to drink from that fountain?"

"Pray don't attempt such a thing," he

cried; "let me fetch you something. I should have no difficulty in finding my way to the refreshment room."

"I don't think you would find me again," she answered, looking piquantly matter-of-fact. "That water looks so cool and inviting, you really must let me be a mermaid for once." And she knelt down by the marble basin, trying to catch some of the water in her pouted lips as it fell sparkling and glittering in the moonlight.

The sweet, hushed air was full of tiny, elfin music; the fountains dancing in the soft, faint light; the marble statues that here and there gleamed strangely life-like; the sudden utter loneliness after that gay, mad, whirling room—all looked weird and ghostly, rousing the poetry of Vivien's heart; poetry so sacredly guarded that no

human hand had ever touched its key-note.

He looked tenderly down on that little gemmed fairy woman, realising her wondrous beauty with sudden passionate pain—pain that was no brother to real love, only an intoxication born of the senses, through which alone such a woman as Julie could ever touch him. His heart would have craved for something higher, something purer, than this despotic, homage-loving coquette; but he thought the fever-fit *love* while it lasted. And now, though all the man's passion was roused, he never for one moment thought of speaking words of love to her. Julie was beautiful, bewitchingly beautiful—a painter's fancy, a poet's ideal incarnate—but she was plighted to another, and in his eyes an engagement to marry was almost as

sacred as marriage itself; and he told himself in his madness that it was only brotherly love he felt for this sunny, beautiful thing. How deceitful our own heart is; how easily it blinds us with such words as Platonic and brotherly !

I don't myself believe in Platonic *love*; but I do sincerely believe in a real honest *friendship* between man and woman—a thorough liking for the spirit independent of age or sex. It is hard for the world to understand this, and perhaps after all such friendship is nearest akin to love, in its purest, noblest meaning, unstained by passion and unclogged by satiety.

“Till taught by pain

Men really know not what good water's worth,”

Julie cried, raising her laughing, brilliant face. And then she made “a pretty cup of both her hands and offered him it.”

What could he do but drink?—tasting the sweetness of those “lady palms” with a strange, quick thrill of pleasure, she laughing the while in saucy, childish merriment.

“Is it true that you are leaving us on Wednesday?” she asked, breaking the slight silence that had fallen on them. He was standing in the porch of the tiny harbour, and as she spoke she looked up from her low rustic seat, her long eyes beaming, softly winning in the moonlight.

“Has not D’Arcy told you? We made our plans three days ago. We are going first to France, and then through Spain and Italy. Change will do him good, I hope. I think the air here is much too keen; I sometimes feel quite anxious about him. My room is close to his, and I hear him cough all night in a

most distressing manner. I wish he would take more care of himself."

"You love D'Arcy very much?" she said, interrogatively and slightly impatient. Out in that soft, maddening moonlight, surely he might wax romantic! The veriest clown she had ever smiled on would have found something to say, however poor, appropriate to the moment; but he, this man she loved with all the undisciplined passion of her nature, stood there towering, like a demigod in his perfect manhood, as cold and passionless as though that fair form was but a visionary delusion of her brain.

He smiled as he made answer—

"Yes, I do love him. We were boys together, almost brothers, and I would give my right hand to save him from injury."

And then the smile grew tenderer even as he looked at her, rebuking his own honest heart by the words as he said them—

“I hope you will let me be a brother to you too some day?”

There was wonderfully little vanity in the man; he did not think for a moment that this imperious beauty loved him. All those winning glances, all that sweet, soft coquetry, he thought was part of her nature; he only knew that he had been near loving her, and conquered the temptation. Oh, vain boast! Perchance there was one by, even then, though invisible to human eye, who laughed it to scorn.

“A brother!” she cried; “why do you taunt me? Surely you must know——”

She was mad. Flinging shame to the winds she rose up swiftly, clasping his arm

with both her hands. She told him all— all the story of her mad love, in a quick clear whisper, the passion of the moment hushing her sweet ringing voice to those tense hurried tones. She told him how she had struggled against this love, and how at the very sound of his voice her whole will fled, leaving her miserably, weakly despicable. She begged him in one incoherent breath to hate her, to forgive her; and then she bowed her head upon her hands and sobbed, "I love you; oh, I love you!"

Vivien had drawn back slightly from that pale, upturned face, all the soft womanly beauty nigh stamped out in its passionate excitement; but when the rapid flow of eloquence died away in the broken sob, "I love you; oh, I love you!" he bent down quickly, encircling the slight

trembling form with his arm till the small, bright head rested on his breast. Assuredly there was passion hidden beneath that calm, proud exterior, and now it leapt to his eyes in a wild soft love-light that no living woman had ever seen there before. He bent down lower and lower. Truly she had never looked more lovely, as with flushed cheeks she raised her eyes, beaming through the lustre of unshed tears. In another moment their lips would have met; but in that moment there came to Vivien's mind, clear and distinct, like the wail of a human cry: "Oh! Vivien, how earnestly I trust that your manhood will find you pure-hearted!" *Pure-hearted!* Working dark treachery against the friend of his youth—loving, trusting, gentle D'Arcy.

He threw back his head with a hard,

short breath; his arm dropped nerveless, heavily from round her. He stood there, out in the clear, bright moonlight, victorious; but the price of his victory was a woman's shame!

She shrank back, bent earthward, like a flower broken at the stem, all the intense passionate nature realising the insult to the full. She had bowed herself down to be trampled on, and she hated him, clenching her small white hands till the shapely nails pierced the delicate flesh. But, womanlike, she was the first to break the painful silence, the first to recover her self-possession. Almost before the warm, quick flush had faded from her face and neck she threw back her head with all her old haughty defiance.

"We will return to the ball-room, if you please, Captain Stanley." And there was

not a single false note in the clear music of her voice. Stung to the quick, all her mother's Spanish nature, all the brave old Bellingham blood, was roused to shield her in its pride. They had been gamblers, *roués*—what you will; but that staunch, old race was ever noted for its bravery. Alone, hereafter, when no eye could mock her agony, she would make her moan; but now she must wreathe her quivering lips in a false, sweet smile, train the misery from her large soft eyes, and bind down her aching, throbbing heart with the iron nerve of her woman's will; for *he* must never, never know her suffering.

He offered her his arm in grave humility, and perhaps for the moment the heavier burden of degradation rested on *his* shoulders. He felt it all so keenly, blaming himself for the sin of loving her, taxing

his heart with not having guarded its shameful secret. He never for one moment accused Julie of want of modesty in that mad confession—the brave, kind heart took all the blame to itself. The sinful passion had died frostily, stricken down in the first horror of his awakened conscience, and Julie could never give it life again; but there was no pride in his conquest; his whole tender heart yearned towards her in pitiful, *brotherly* love. Yes, he could say that word truthfully *now*, and he felt a pain something akin to the agony of years ago, when his gun, aimed at a tiger, had unwittingly shot his own bonnie horse. They had loved each other in their own way, and shared many a glorious Western hunt, and the hot tears that had rained down on its dainty quivering limbs almost rose to his eyes now as he felt the tiny weight of her

hand on his arm, the hand of the beautiful, fragile thing he had wounded. He raised it to his lips respectfully, humbly, as he might have kissed the hand of a crowned queen; and Julie, in one quick mental flash, realised the nobility of the man, owning to herself, with a warm flush of the pride we often find sad consolation in, when the "might have been" has bitterly disappointed us, that her love had not been misplaced. He was so worthy of love, towering in his manly beauty, and loyal height of principle above all the men she had ever known, and the woman's heart knew that the secret of her shame was safe with Vivien Stanley.



CHAPTER III.



AS punctual as the postman is almost a proverb, but here I think we ought to say as unpunctual as the postman," grumbled Sir Hugh, pushing back his chair from the breakfast-table; "half-past eight, and no sign of the idiot! I declare I'll——"

What threat of dire vengeance would have followed none ever knew, for at that moment a servant entered with the post-bag and a large parcel of books. The *châtelaine's* white hand distributed the letters, keeping two back, with a roguish sparkle in her bright black eyes.

“I don’t think I’ll let Hugh have these,” she said at last. “Such impatience is a sure sign that they are worth reading, and my own correspondence is wretchedly dull. This is a lady’s writing, too; no man ever scratched those spidery L’s. Such a fat letter, too!” She turned it over, never looking towards her husband, or the black menace in his eyes might have startled her. “A pretty monogram in blue and gold, ‘A. M.,’” with a rippling laugh. “Oh, fie, Hugh; who is——? Oh!——”

The last exclamation was wrung from her in quick surprise, for Sir Hugh had risen from his seat, and, stepping behind her chair, quickly seized the mysterious epistle.

“Ah, Mistress Nina, I am even with you, you little tease!” he cried, full of good-natured gaiety, now that the letter

was safe in his own hand. "As a punishment for your curiosity, you shall not see a line of this letter. 'Curiosity is a woman's curse,' you know."

"And a man's is a great deal worse," she laughed. "You were just as curious as I was, Hugh; you could not sit patiently till I passed it to you."

There was no jealousy in that bonnie bright girl; she had only wanted "to tease Hugh a little," and her laugh rang out, musically mocking, at having succeeded; but I think had she seen those passionate dark eyes a moment ago, even her pure mind would have learnt suspicion. Perhaps it was well for her that she did not. "Ignorance is bliss when 'tis folly to be wise," and there was many a black secret in his evil past that the innocent heart would have trembled to know.

“What are you reading?” she said, turning to Julie, who had unpacked the novels, and now stood leaning on the back of a chair; the graceful curve of her lissom form, the bright face bent over the book she held.

I always remember Julie more as a perfect picture than a living woman; smiling or grave, seated or standing, there are too many copies of that perfect face and form in my soul's picture gallery. Oh! Cleopatra, Dido, Sappho, all ye who wielded the sceptre of coquetry when the world was young, were you as lovely as this modern witch? Were your eyes as bright, were your lips as red? Did there float round you her nameless, subtle charm of fascination? If so, no wonder men's heads reeled, and men's hearts were drunken, with your beauty.

“What would the author, who has so carefully prepared all these exciting surprises and disappointments, say to my anticipating the mental feast?” Julie laughed, closing the book and taking up another. “A new novel by Whyte Melville, *Nina love*. I *am* glad. I was so tired of last week’s packet of silly love tales, where every one weds in the last chapter, as you knew they would in the second; where every Jill has the Jack of her heart; or, to be more refined, where every Romeo marries Juliet. Why will people write such *trash*? It is never so in real life—never!” And the bright smile faded for an instant, but beamed up again, mockingly defiant, at her father’s laughing cry—

“Why, Julie, who has broken your brave heart?”

It was a random shot, but how near the

mark! Under the brodered bodice of her dainty morning robe lay something heavily akin to a broken heart: an aching something, that had made its moan every waking moment of those three long days since that hateful masquerade ball. But the burden of its cry brought no useless tears to those soft eyes, but a restless fevered flash, and a hot, stinging flush to face and neck.

"Oh, my shame! my shame!" were the cruel words that scorched her brain, and the reproach was harder to bear than the memory of any deep, dire sin would have been. But in company she must be gay, bright, and winning; and you would travel far to find a more perfect actress than this fair Julie. We heap praise upon puppets trained to simulate human woe, but what are they in comparison to the men and women who daily tread the world's stage, the cynosure

of all eyes, smiling and gay, while hourly the hidden dagger presses their aching hearts! We know them by no sign; we pass them by unconscious of their suffering; and yet we speak of acting as though it were a rare gift.

"Must one have a broken heart, papa, to rebel against being fed with insipid sweet-meats?" she said, laying her hand, like a soft, shapely snowflake, on the shoulder of his rough shooting-coat. "I hate the very sight of a three-volume novel, but I always take up any book by the author of 'The Gladiators' with the keen pleasure of an Epicurean who can depend on his cook."

"What do you know about cooking?" her father cried, pinching her cheek. "You take no interest in the divine art of making food palatable. My little girl would dine off ambrosia, and never ask for the receipt!"

"Food is what Julie calls the coarse necessity of life," laughed Nina.

"Cooking," continued the Colonel, who was now on his hobby, "is in reality a fine art. What have your poets, your novelist, your painter done in comparison to the man who invented an *omelette*?"

"Oh! hush, pray papa!" Julie cried, pouting. "Mentioning poets and painters in the same breath with a *chef-de-cuisine*! Is it not shocking, Captain Stanley?"

Julie took every opportunity of pointedly addressing Vivien now. In studying this woman's character, I have often wondered if this was a proud way of ignoring her former madness, or if it was simply for the pleasure of speaking to the man she loved, oh! so madly, in spite of the bitter past.

"It does seem rather irreverent, Miss Bellingham," he said, with that bright,

quiet smile she loved so well, kindling as it did the dark beauty of his face; "but I don't think Byron or Raphael would do you any good if you were really hungry."

Really hungry! How the starving heart gleamed from those yearning, tawny eyes. Byron or Raphael, Tennyson or Guido—what could they do, those treasured favourites, dearly as the refined, passionate heart loved them? What could a whole army of poets and artists do to fill the empty, aching void that cold, calm man had left in her life? Hot, glowing, brain-maddening words but fed her love. Softly-tinted, perfect colouring could only bring back his beauty painfully life-like. Would it be always so? Must all that was perfect in art, all that was tender in romance, but serve as comparisons for *him*!

"You have not yet rendered unto Cæsar

the things which be Cæsar's," said Sir Hugh, stopping in his present amusement of feeding Lady Bellingham's lapdog with dainty morsels of game-pie. "Will you pass me my other letter, Nina *mia*?"

"Please leave Tiny alone, Hugh!" she cried, piteously; "you know we never give him meat so early in the day."

"Tiny! Tiny!"

But the fresh voice called in vain; Sir Hugh held the little dog fast, laughing at her distress. It was his turn to tease now.

"Not until you give me my letter," he said.

"But it is not for you; it is for Mr. Strafford. Ah! my beauty, did they treat 'ou badly; why did not 'ou bite them, my Tiny-wisey?" (to her fat little pug-dog.) "Will you kindly take it up to him, Captain

Stanley? He asked to see you. He is not very well this morning; so I sent him up breakfast in his own room."

"Not well!" Vivien cried, with a quick start; they had planned leaving the Lodge early the next morning. Since that scene in the arbour he had no wish to stay an hour longer than necessary under the same roof with Julie Bellingham; and now D'Arcy was ill! Illness with him must needs be dangerous, so weak and wasted had he become.

D'Arcy smiled, a quick, warm flush of pleasure, when he saw the letter.

"It is from my father," he said, laying it down by the side of his untasted breakfast, dainty enough to tempt an invalid though it was; and Vivien guessed by the fair flowers so tastefully arranged in the rare old vase, whose white hands had seen to all things

needful before those delicate viands were carried up to D'Arcy's room : not Julie, he knew, though the boy praised her thoughtfulness with a tender love-light in his soft blue eyes. He looked sadly worn and ill ; the loose dressing-gown falling with painful distinctness to his wasted form ; the blue veins in his temples contrasting the poor, sharp, pallid face.

"You are looking very ill !" Vivien said, taking the thin white hand. I am sure the air here is much too keen for you. Change will do you good !" And he stroked the weak, frail hand gently.

"I shall not be able to leave just yet," D'Arcy said, almost imploringly. "I *must* win back the money I lost last night."

"Why stay here for that reason? You could 'play' with me at Boulogne, you know." Vivien felt quite guilty when he

thought of the subtle depth of his plan, but those feverish blue eyes read through its simplicity.

. "You want to *give* me money, and don't know how to insult me by offering it," he said, with all the peevish irritability of an invalid.

A dark red flush mounted through the sun-tan of Stanley's brow.

"Indeed you wrong me," was all he said.

"You know I want money," the other continued, querulously, "and you try to treat me as a child. I would have asked you to lend me a few thousands before I went to the Jews, only you were a poor man then."

"Why not borrow of me now?" he cried; "I have more than I know what to do with."

An expression very like a death agony passed over the other's face.

"I do not borrow of you now," he said, hoarsely, "because I should never be able to pay you. If I live to be eighty years old I shall never be any better off, for I have mortgaged all right of succession to my father's property; and if he died to-morrow, I should still be the beggar I am now. 'Play' is my only chance; fate and fortune must turn for one who waits as patiently as I do."

There was a pathetic passion in the last words, showing how bitter the waiting had been, how wasted the patience.

All Vivien's heart woke full of pained astonishment and deep pity. "Borrow of me, D'Arcy, and pay off the mortgage," he cried. "I would sell out my last farthing to help you. I owe a debt to your family

that gold can never cancel. We have been brothers, D'Arcy," and the rich voice trembled ; "trust me as a brother."

"Dear old friend, dear old brother," he cried, pressing the strong brown hand. "Always generous and noble ! I can never pay off those mortgages, for they are foreclosed."

There was none of the bitter excitement in his voice of a man who is ruined, only a dull apathy ; but it spoke with pitiful force to Vivien's heart, for it was the calmness of despair.

"To think that you should have gone to the Jews, instead of coming to me," Vivien said, in a low, pained voice. "Oh ! D'Arcy, what can I do for you ?"

Once before he had felt the curse of his useless wealth, when he mourned his dead mother, the day he became its heir. It

seemed as though that pitiless old miser had left his bane upon it, that it might hoard, but never spend.

“Have you paid all your ‘play’ debts?” he asked, suddenly.

“They are all paid, even what I lost last night,” D’Arcy answered. “Oh yes, all my ‘play’ debts are paid. But at such a price! The price of my peace, of my conscience, of my soul!” And then, to Vivien’s pained astonishment, he bowed his head upon his hands, sobbing like a child.

Vivien was very gentle with him; weak and ill, how could he be otherwise? but his face blanched to a deadly white as the *forger* told his tale. For the weak man before him, trusting to the similarity of his own and Lord Clowden’s writing, had signed several cheques in his father’s name.

“Those cheques must be recovered at

any risk," Vivien said, when all was told. "Lord Clowden may discover the forgery, and set some clever detective to work, and——" He stopped, arrested by the white horror of D'Arcy's face. He did not know how the boy feared his father; worse than the scandal, worse than his poverty, rose the stern fury of Lord Clowden's wrath. That proud old man could never brook public dishonour!

"Do you know who holds those cheques?" Vivien said, gently.

"Colonel Johnson won them all; but some were signed before your arrival. You won't get them all, Vivien, I am afraid."

"I shall try. Colonel Johnson, of the Lock Farm, is it not? I never liked that man's face; I can hardly think he won them fairly."



CHAPTER IV.



VERY notable farmhouse, the rambling old building had once been, but the busy hands were at rest that had taken such pride in its well-kept dairy, and now a gay parterre bloomed in the old farmyard, and hunters chafed in the *ci-devant* cowhouse. Its present owner, formerly Philip Johnson of the Guards, had married the late farmer's rosy widow, and at her death he had given up the farm and turned the place into a snug country seat. No one wondered at his having done so, for of all men assuredly that extravagant soldier had not the

slightest talent for agriculture : and goodly pasturage and fair cornfields passed quickly through those heedless fingers. He had never married again, though it was some ten years since he lost his wife ; and faulty as he was in many respects, the three little children left to his care had never lacked a father's love.

From their very first meeting, Vivien had taken a dislike to the man. Vague and unreasoning though it was, he had cherished it through their brief acquaintance. He was not wont to attach any importance to that frivolous feeling of presentiment called reading a person at first sight ; and he never based his judgment on the opinion of such a moment, waiting for any one to honestly earn his friendship or his dislike ; but either, once given, he rarely took back. Yet Colonel Johnson

had never given overt cause for the feeling of aversion, that, try as he would, he could not quite shake off; and now, as he entered the Lock Farm, all his old dislike of the man returned, tenfold increased by the knowledge that he held the proofs of D'Arcy's crime.

"Glad to see you, Stanley! Glad to see you," he cried, cordially. "Pray take a seat. The first time you've been to my little place. Have you breakfasted? What will you take?"

Vivien had been shown into the breakfast-room, where Colonel Johnson was seated *en famille*, and three pair of childish eyes were turned on him, full of vague curiosity.

"My daughters Millicent and May, and my son James," said their father, with a collective wave of his hand.

Millicent, May, and James, thus introduced, rose up like three little Jacks-in-the-box, and sat down again.

"Thank you, I have breakfasted," Vivien said, coldly. "When you are at leisure, I should like a few moments' private conversation with you."

He was a short, foxy-haired man, with a pair of restless blue eyes, and now he fixed them on Vivien furtively.

"Private conversation!" he repeated. "Certainly. I am quite at leisure now. Will you step this way?" And he led him into a small ante-room that might once have been a pantry, but was now, like the rest of the house, elegantly furnished. People said furnishing his house was Colonel Johnson's hobby, and he had been known to meditate for days on the pattern of a wall-paper or the colour of a chair-cover.

"Pray take a seat, Captain Stanley; I am quite at your service."

"I shall only detain you a few moments," Vivien said, not taking the proffered chair, but resting his hand lightly on the back of it. He felt strangely inclined to knock that cautious looking little man down; so he held the chair instead. It is astonishing how an under-current of unexpressed thought often shows itself in some trivial action. "I only called to ask you to oblige me with those cheques of Lord Clowden Strafford's that Mr. Strafford paid his 'play' debts with."

This was very incautious of Captain Stanley; as I said before, he was not good at stratagem; a moment afterwards he realised his clumsy handling of so delicate a matter, by the satirical smile that spread over the other's face.

"I should be sorry to think you mad, Captain Stanley. May I ask the meaning of such an extraordinary request?"

Vivien took no notice of the man's insolent insinuation. "I came from my friend, Mr. Strafford," he said, calmly; "he has a very strong reason for wishing to have those cheques again; and if you will kindly tell me the total of all you have received, I have in my possession a blank cheque which you can fill up to the amount."

"Really, Captain Stanley, with all willingness to oblige you, I cannot possibly move in this matter without speaking to Mr. Strafford himself."

"If you will understand me," Vivien said, angrily, "I have come from Mr. Strafford; he is not well enough to come himself, and it is of the utmost importance that he should regain possession of those cheques."

All the cautious watchfulness had disappeared from the other's manner, and he raised his eyes till they met Vivien's, more defiantly than boldly. He read that honest simple heart clearly as a book; and poor D'Arcy could scarcely have chosen a worse ambassador than Vivien Stanley. Colonel Johnson's conscience, though not very acute, was still honest enough to exclaim warningly against the trickery by which he won so much at "play;" and, moreover, he would have been ashamed to have those cheques publicly shown, for the amount signed was larger than any club, however lenient, would have quite approved. But now he saw by Vivien's manner that it was not to expose him, but to shield D'Arcy, that those cheques were wanted; so he immediately took another tone.

"I don't understand you in the least,

Captain Stanley ; but if, as you say, Mr. Strafford really wants those cheques, I am sorry I cannot oblige him ; it is out of my power to return them, for they are no longer in my possession."

"Not one of them?" Vivien cried.

"No, not one of them, and I really don't know when or where I used them."

"God help him!" Vivien said, in a quick whisper. "There is nothing left now but to write to Lord Clowden."

* * * * *

God help him! Perhaps those words soared upwards in the light of an answered prayer, for never had erring mortal sorer need of God's help.

There, where Vivien left him, D'Arcy sat, white and rigid. The fixed horror in his blue dilated eyes, the piteous, helpless misery of his weak, quivering mouth, he

looked more like a child who had been frightened than a grown man wrestling with a great agony.

At his feet lay Lord Clowden's letter, the frail weapon that had stricken him down.

"My dear boy," it ran, "I hope in a few days now to see you again. You will scarcely believe how tired I feel of this restless, wandering life, knowing what a nomadic creature I am; but now I have had travelling enough, and I am quite longing for home. It is not my own feelings entirely that are bringing me back to England. I find that some designing, clever rogue (I can't help admiring his imitative talent, although I am the sufferer) has taken the liberty of using my signature a little too freely, and he has really *succeeded* in obtaining several very large sums

in my name. So, my boy, finding time anything but light on my hands, I am speeding home, and I hope, with the help of several clever detectives, to unearth this sly thief soon. The person must really be a genius, for the plot was bold in conception and wonderfully well worked out——”

D’Arcy read no more ; he lay back in his chair panting for breath, as a fox might exhausted in covert with the pack in view. He felt benumbed, frightened, incapable of thought, his mind calling feebly for Vivien at the crisis. He could suggest, he could soothe ; and then vaguely he remembered that Vivien had gone to get those cheques back. *To get those cheques back !* Even in his horrible despair he laughed aloud at the thought. It came so vividly to him, like something he had read—how those detectives would work, slowly but surely,

till they traced the miserable crime to himself—to *him*, the possible heir to a dukedom, a branded forger! And Julie—— A cold damp chilled his brow when he thought of her. It should never be; he would die first! He said it as one might speak in a passion, thoughtlessly and without meaning; but he repeated the words again——

“*I will die first!*”

And a sudden delirious light seemed to break upon him. He had but to put a bullet through his brain and all would be over; the shame, the horror, the disgrace! He rose up, his hands shook so that he could hardly place the crutches; his mouth quivered with painful excitement; and a bright carnation burnt in his cheeks, making the large startled eyes look unnaturally bright and blue.

I believe the sudden realisation of his worst fears had turned his brain. He had been brought up in a God-fearing home. Naturally of a timid, superstitious disposition, I am sure, had he been sane, that horrible thought could never have entered his mind. He took up a pen, hastily writing these few words—

“DEAR FATHER,—It was I who forged those cheques ; alive I could never have confessed it. Perhaps when I am dead you will find some excuse in my temptation ; not that I wish to excuse myself. I shall be dead when you read this. Penniless and disgraced, there is nothing left for me to live for.”

He signed and sealed this strange letter ; adding no word of loving farewell to the father he was about to leave for ever.

D'Arcy honoured his father, but Clowden had never been tender with the boy's too sensitive heart ; and now the habit of years clung to him and chilled all show of affection.

Somehow the enormity of the crime he was going to commit seemed dwarfed by the black misery of the present. He saw nothing beyond the earthly judgment, that judgment he was so bent on fleeing ; *that* he could realise, but beyond—all was blank, and the chill of that blank had no terror for him.

His resolution made a man of him, all the half-childish weakness was gone now ; and there was almost a shadow of Clowden's determined expression on his fair, girlish face, as he stood toying with his loaded pistol ; that little silver-mounted toy that

held his life in its tiny mouth. He had written his letter impatiently, as though the delay fretted him ; but now he felt like a man who has gotten his ticket for a long journey, and who knows that there is some little time before the train will arrive. He realised a feeling of great freedom ; there was no need to hurry, he might dally with a few moments longer. They were not precious living moments, moments precious because burdened with life, but an idle breathing time that was only pleasant because there was no need to hurry. He took up his pen again and wrote two letters, tender, loving notes ; one for Vivien, and the other for Julie. He arranged them side by side with the one addressed to Lord Clowden. And then, without hurry, without the slightest show of fear, without an

eyelid quivering or his hand shaking, the *madman* pointed the pistol at his own brain and pulled the trigger.

A strong brown hand was laid on his arm, swiftly, firmly pressing it aside, and the bullet went crashing through the opposite wall. But the shock was so great, the relaxation so terrible, that he fell back in Vivien's arms, stone dead !





CHAPTER V.



SUNSET in the country, "rosy and beautiful;" one grand golden flame, tinting the sweet, hushed air, brightening with carmine splendour the emerald softness of earth's fresh robe. Sunset on the sea—the roaring, tossing, foaming deep! The mighty expanse of unutterable calm! The great glowing ball sinking far away in the shining waters, throwing around a glittering canopy of prism-light. Sunset in the city, clothing the dull, grey, neutral tints with sudden beauty; lighting up the windows till they flash out like great crimson eyes; dwelling fondly on the fair

drooping flowers a slatternly beggar girl is selling on the kerbstone, finding gold in her tumbled, ill-kept hair; throwing its bright transient gems on all alike, like a giant playing with earth's baubles. Anon it will fade away into a great, beautiful, blue-black cloud—

“Thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.”

Yes, all is beautiful that is natural—the sunrise, the noontide's glow, the gloaming, and the night.

Earth is beautiful where man has never reared his hideous handiwork, hideous in its cold lifelessness compared to loving, living Nature. Youth is beautiful—sparkling, tinted, witching youth! Life is beautiful; glory-crowned age is beautiful; the first calm of death is beautiful. The one ugly thing in life is *sin*, the canker

that eats the beauty till it fades, hideous and rotten to the core.

Into a gay bright room the sunset crept, revelling on its dainty *boudoir* lining; dwelling fondly, for the Giver of beauty loves it well, on the wondrous perfection of the woman lying there. The firm, round, gemmed arm is thrown above her head, for she is lazily restless, this fair Julie, and has donned her dinner-dress full an hour too soon from the wish "to do something;" the idle days are all too long. It is not worth while to scorch her lily fair flesh in the hot city streets, or in the dull, dusty Park. It is not worth while to array herself in fashion's glory, when the only eyes are far away whose admiration she ever craved for; so she has spent the afternoon in lonely abortive attempts at killing time, the strong young giant dying by slow

degrees. There on the floor lies Dumas *fil's* last novelette, flung down in unreasoning anger, because its heroine is loved all too madly by the one man of her heart. Why should they be loved—those scarcely pretty, slightly questionable French heroines—while she, an acknowledged Belle, full of life and passion as her own ripe beauty, is loverless and alone?

She hates them all—those white-tied, black-tailed dandies, who crowd round her at the season balls, greedily amorous, because she is *the fashion*; those Poole-covered, moustached, tall donkeys, who will never forget their nursery lisp, who hang on her Victoria in the close-packed Park: hates them, flashing dangerous, maddening defiance from her long, gleaming eyes—“shining like a clear stream through a fringe of long dark grass”—as one of the

smitten ones said the other day, which marvellous flower from a known dull brain has since been quoted at all the clubs.

There comes back to her now another scene, totally foreign to that sunset-lit, gay *boudoir*—a picture bright with soft, faint moonbeams; a scenery almost Oriental in its rich splendour—all as a background to that tall turbaned man, with his deep soft eyes and darkly beautiful face. She sees again those eyes light up a sudden, mad, sweet fire, so full of burning eloquence that her heart reeled giddily for the moment, like one drunken with strong red wine. She feels the quick, firm pressure of his arms as vividly now as though it were but yesternight, and not three long years ago, since she reaped her bitter reward of woman's shame out in the soft still moonlight.

And then her thoughts wander on to the after-horror, and she shudders in that warm scented room; not a shudder of pity for the poor distraught soul that had tried to pass to eternity through the door of a great sin, but the selfish Sybaritic horror of a vain frivolous nature at the thought of anything dreadful, and she gives a little quick cry as her father opens the door behind her.

“Oh! papa, how you frightened me!”

“Frightened you, my pretty one?” he says, sitting wearily down by her side. Fashionable life is very tiring, and the noonday’s heat has not been merciful. He *must* do something; a man can’t lie on a sofa all day, like a lazy woman; so he gossips at the clubs, and basks in the Park, finding it all very slow, feeling strangely tired when the day is done, and longing

for the hardier toil of the hunting season.

“Frightened you, my darling?” he says again, taking the soft jewelled fingers in his fat old hands.

“Yes, papa,” with another shudder; “I was thinking of that dreadful time, you know.”

“Ah! By-the-by, Julie, whom do you think I saw to-day?”

“I hate having to guess at anything,” with a piquant pout; “it tires one’s brain for nothing. Tell me, you weary-looking, old papino.”

“Poor old Strafford. I never saw a man so aged in my life. He was driving a pair of splendid greys; brought them himself from Arabia, Hammersley says.—It must have been a great shock to him; he looks quite careworn and old,”

"Why does he not marry again, I wonder?" Julie murmurs.

"He's a handsome old chap enough," laughs her father; "gilt by the approaching coronet, for they say the Duke can't last much longer; he's wasted to a perfect shadow. Supposing *you* console the aged heir, *ma belle*?"

There is no answering laughter in Julie's face; her great eyes are open and full of rapt, thoughtful beauty, and the full red lips are firmly closed.

"Papa," she says, suddenly, "will you reintroduce me to Lord Clowden?"

"Reintroduce you to Lord Clowden! Why, Julie, you surely can't mean to——"

But the soft light fingers pressed his lips, smothering the nearly uttered words.

"Leave me alone, papa darling; only do as I ask you."

She stands by his side, her hand on his shoulder, looking down at him in all the glory of her fresh womanly beauty.

"Papa," she says, after a smiling pause, during which that busy brain has never rested, "which is Lord Clowden's favourite club?"

"Boodles' is the only club where I've ever met him," he answers, his eyes round with astonishment.

"Then, papa, I should very much like to go over Boodles'. Will you take me some day, when you know that Lord Clowden is there?"

"I don't like it, Julie," he cries, warmly. "What will people say? Why, he would have been your father-in-law if that poor fellow had not—if *it* had not happened."

"But it *did* happen, papa dear," she says, calmly; "so, consequently, he is not my father-in-law. If every one weighed

their conduct by the 'might have been,' what a tangle the world would be in!"

Which unanswerable logic strikes him dumb.

* * * * *

So a few days after, according to their arrangement, Julie receives a telegram. It contains the one word—

"Come."

But she knows what it means. There is no need to dress. You would never find Julie *en déshabille*; all her lazy reclining never tumbles a lock of her hair that is not meant to be tumbled—never disarranges a fold of her neatly piquant dress. So now she has only to don a bewitching little hat, only to change her dainty *bottines*, and case her hands in tight French kid, and she looks—as a pretty woman only can look—dressed with perfect taste.

Her father meets her at the top of time-honoured St. James's Street; and together, quite by chance (?) they find Lord Clowden in the club reading-room. The weary, bored look vanishes from his worn aristocratic face, as his eyes light on this fair Julie, winning, cordial in her kind remembrance of him.

He is wonderfully changed, she thinks; that lined face is quite old in its well-trimmed setting of iron-grey hair; but from head to heel he bears that nameless something that sums up the grand old total—gentleman. Clad in a beggar's rags, the man would still carry that wondrous stamp of birth that proclaims against the common saying that all men are equal. So Julie's shallow heart is satisfied. He is aristocratic-looking; he is rich; he will inherit a dukedom; the man she loves

will never marry her—so she will marry this man!

One of her greatest gifts was patience—having made up her mind to accomplish a certain thing, she knew how to wait. So she went home that afternoon perfectly satisfied with the day's work—perfectly satisfied she continued, though for a whole week she did not see Clowden again.

One day she is driving her dashing pair of steppers through Pall Mall, when she spies him, smiling with pleasure, eager for her notice; so she draws in her fretting, impatient horses, holding out a wee welcoming hand.

“Papa is not very well to-day,” she says, with her fresh sweet smile. “It would be such a charity if you would pay him a tiny visit.”

“I shall be only too happy!” he cries.

It would be hard to refuse a pretty pleading woman anything, he thinks.

“Then will you jump in, and let me drive you home?” And she smiles, with all a child’s coy shyness beaming in her long eyes; she will use her fresh bright youth as a weapon against this old man’s heart.

So the first evening is strung on the long list of many others that Clowden passes with Julie Bellingham. Her father would sometimes doze while she tried to weave her spell—the spell of her beauty. Or sometimes the two men would enjoy a social rubber; but it was a dull game at best. That sweet, ringing voice, clear as the music of silver bells, rich as the lark’s glad heavenward cry; that bended, rounded, graceful form; those white hands travelling in melody over the ivory keys, surely wooed them from the goddess “Chance;” and they

would forget the waiting cards, and watch her—one heart full of a father's pride, the other, despite its heavy load of years, drinking in, with the madness of youth, the subtle poison that fair witch had prepared.

Strangely enough, Lord Clowden had never heard of D'Arcy's engagement to Julie; there had been so little sympathy between father and son, that the boy had never confided it to him, most probably because the wedding-day had never been fixed; and the gentle sensitive heart may have shrank from Clowden's possible raillery on so indefinite an engagement. And now the world was shy of mentioning the son's name even to the father whom he had disgraced.

One soft sunny afternoon they sat together, Clowden and Julie. She hates needlework; but now she is toiling daintily

at a gay smoking cap—that is to say, she is knitting bright silks together, and she tells him naïvely that it is intended for a smoking-cap. There is something very winning in a pretty woman using the implements of her sex—those little shapeless bits of steel that are so mighty in her soft guiding fingers; and the fair Julie is well aware of that fact.

The Venetian blinds are down, and the lazy sunlight just catches a choice piece of colouring here and there, and flaunts it mockingly in contrast with the prevailing shadow. It rests on Julie's soft Eastern profile; it marks off the supple contour of her white-clad, cool, bending form, and plays with the gems on her busy white hands; now brightening an already brilliant smile, now shining lambent and sweet in the changing depth of her half-veiled eyes.

And Clowden watches her, drunk with her beauty, but sadly alive to the cruel jest of his own grey hair and furrowed brow, by the side of that soft, smooth, childish face.

He has told himself that he is a fool in his old age again and again, laughed at himself bitterly for his madness, and digested such-like wisdom savagely with his nightly smoke; but it is no use; he *is* a fool, and must continue so; for in his gay, sinful youth surely his heart never beat more madly than it does now, in the fading decay of his old age.

"There is no fool like an old fool," he is telling himself bitterly now, as he watches her, abjectly as a dog might, hungering for her smile—that sweet ready smile that cleft the cool, smooth crimson of her lips, showing for a few brief maddening moments

the tiny dazzling teeth beneath—that smile that leapt to her eyes a topaz flash, and gave a warmer roundness to those round smooth cheeks.

“Shall we see you at Paris this winter?” she asks, with just the look that unmans him most; and then dropping her eyelids again, that he may see what a shadow their long lashes leave on her cheek’s clear bloom.

“I hope so,” he says, eagerly, made shy by his great love; “that is, if I may join you; but I feared you had seen too much of me already?”

She looks up winningly reproachful, but says never a word.

“You see,” he continues, and a great pain settles on the careworn, fine old face, “I am so old that it must be quite a bore to you, my coming here so often; but I shall

never forget your kindness to the lonely old man. I have often tried to make up my mind not to come here any more—at least not so frequently—but I can't keep away; these visits are the one oasis of my dreary life."

"I thought you must be lonely," she says, softly; "yet most men find their clubs so good a substitute for home."

"Club life!" he cries, contemptuously; for his whole heart is full of a pleasant picture, bright with the sunlight of a *home-like* home—a home where a woman reigns, gladdening the hearth with her softening influence. "Club life is a delusion and a snare—a cold, hard parody on the word home. A club is a library, a billiard-room, an eating-house, as useful as a cab, and almost as comfortless. Some of my most weary, lonely hours have been spent at the

club. And when you are tired of my old face I must go back to the dreary, purposeless club life again."

"I have not grown tired of you yet," she laughs, gaily, "and perhaps I never shall."

"You are very good," he says, gratefully; and then he looks at her, marvelling at the beautiful blush that covers her face. Suddenly a new light dawns on him, and all the strong old instincts wake in his heart.

"Oh! Julie, can it be possible?" he cries; "and I love you so!"

She bends her head lower to hide the triumph in her laughing eyes, and her little hand trembles in his eager clasp.

"I am so old," he says, in happy, wondering incredulity. "Oh! my darling, say it is not a dream. Can I indeed link your bright beautiful youth with my dull age?"

She draws a little closer to him in pretty, half-shrinking shyness, allowing him to fold her in his arms.

"Say you will like me a little, my darling," he whispers, his strong voice trembling, holding her from him to watch the sweet changing face.

The ready lie comes all too quickly to her rose-leaf lips—

"Indeed, Clowden, I—I love you now."

"God bless you!" he says, gravely. "Oh! child, I trust that you may never regret those precious words."

He smooths the soft hair that grows so low on her broad brow, gently and tenderly, and then he kisses her on the cheek. It is the kiss of their betrothal, and Julie knows it with a sudden chill.

"Oh! Vivien," her heart cries piteously;

“oh! Vivien, Vivien, if I could have won your love like this!”

All the summer she has toiled *for this*; the guerdon of her patience, the fruition of her hope, is won—the worn-out heart of an old *roué*. Marvel you that she feels no triumph, only the black horror of a great despair?





CHAPTER VI.

SO the fashionable world had a new subject of gossip in Julie's wedding, and having grown tired of speculating on the motives that might have led to such a marriage, it tried to pick holes, figuratively speaking, in the lady herself; but here the scandal-mongers were signally foiled, for Lady Clowden was most discreet; indeed, had she stepped straight from the nursery to Hymen's altar, she could scarcely have been more irreproachably "proper." She had married for wealth and a position in society, and she was too wise to throw her advantages away.

The men had always been her friends, but there were many women of fashion who had rather boasted of excluding "Miss Bellingham" from their set. But Julie knew that the future Duchess of Hampshire could afford to show present contempt for past injuries, provided she did not overtly offend Madam Grundy. So at first she accepted all society's overtures, and feigned to forget the time when her flirtations had laid her under its bane; using all her fascinations on the women, and rather ignoring the men; so that even Clowden, who was prone to be jealous of his new treasure, was quite deceived by this crafty little Julie's new policy.

There are many outwardly respectable Bohemians, people who to the world's eye have been born with the proverbial silver spoon in their mouth; people who move

gracefully enough often among the foremost in fashion's pageant. Yet, if the truth were known, these West End wanderers are just as full of care, and just as penniless, as their brothers who pitch their shabby tents in the East. Now Julie had been a Belgravian Bohemian, trading on society with all a freebooter's licence; but she was one no longer now, and, to tell the truth, she was rather tired of Bohemianism, and had only joined that outlawed naughty band in her search for a rich husband; and now, having got all she wanted, undisturbed by sentiment or affection, she would have been really an ungrateful little woman if she had not settled down into something rather respectable.

In the second year of her marriage the real *bonne bouche* came in her husband's accession to dukedom, and henceforth you

would have thought that "Her Grace the Duchess" had nothing but roses under her dainty feet and sunshine unclouded over her coronet-adorned head; but, unfortunately, there was an ugly skeleton in the inmost corner of her heart, and that skeleton was the ghastly fact that she did not love her husband—her stately old husband, whom she slightly respected and cordially hated.

It was almost affecting to see how thoroughly he believed in her, how tenderly he loved her, how fondly he admired her; this girl his wealth could only console for the fact that she was his wife, and whose whole heart was beating daily, hourly, for another man. So unrestrainedly that he could watch the rose tint deepen and pale in her cheeks as she thought of him, his unknown, unsuspected rival;

watch her large eyes wake to light, and almost catch the name that came quivering so often to her lips—Vivien.

But he never suspected her. Poor old Clowden loved Julie with all an old man's idolising, doting fondness; loved her selfishly as we love the sunshine, as we love our wealth, as we love the brightness of our lives, as a gem, a pet,—a precious glimpse of that thing that had gone from him for evermore—*his youth!*—that lost, misspent, tenderly regretted youth. He loved her—

“With all love, except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest.”

Not as he had loved Marion. A love that, had he been a better man, he would have more thoroughly appreciated in its dawn, and not have waited for those fourteen

parted years to teach him its value—the true meaning of that tender old word, wife; a companion whose whole heart and soul is but a purer reflection of her husband's; a friend, a comforter, a precious holy link to earth, a fellow-traveller on the road to God! All this Marion might have been to him; all this Julie never could be. But she was the darling of his old age—a brightening sunbeam in his lonely house; and she seemed content to fall into the niche he had carved for her, away from the big busy world, shielded from its storms—"the light of his home."

Julie had never known the real meaning of that ugly word, poverty. Hers had been a gaily gilt, unsuspected Bohemianism, but she possessed a thoroughly selfish sensual heart, and having all things save one coveted treasure, found poverty in that one

want. All that her girlish imagination had pictured and craved for was hers now. Wealth, title, and position—not a mere fashionable nonentity, but a real leader among the very women who but a short time back had been frigidly polite, or else pretended an entire forgetfulness of her; women who, as they sat benched and lonely, had drawn in their satin robes when she danced by them with the handsomest eligibles of the day; women who had blackened her character in private, when they deigned to mention her at all, *now* flocked round her, “the beautiful young duchess,” eager for her notice and her coveted invitations. Julie’s quiet satire realised all this, and profited by it, taking all their friendship and admiration at what it was worth, but carefully keeping it, knowing that easily earned as such surface

love is, it is valuable so far, that its loss can well outweigh all the world's other baubles.

She was a woman of the world, certainly ; but what else could she be, poor soul ? Having loved, and loved in vain, and knowing no other comfort, naturally she turned to the world for consolation, finding in its hollow gaiety, and surface-gilt glory, at least an antidote against her aching heart. And yet in spite of all this wealth she had longed and toiled to possess, the one true, tender piece of womanhood in her selfish, Sybaritic heart asserted itself in her love, for she would willingly at any moment have given it all up, could she have won Vivien by the sacrifice. She would even build castles, or rather *huts*, in the air, and dwell in them with him, picturing herself waiting with the table spread, and the kettle sing-

ing on the hob—after the pattern of a model little engraving she had once seen—waiting for *his* coming home. Her romance always pictured him poor, because then she could have worked for him, and those idle lady hands longed to toil for the man she loved. She would build up these wild fancies while her maid twined priceless gems in her soft bright hair: while listening to the compliments of Royalty itself she was often mentally enjoying the dismal pleasure of watching by Vivien's bed of sickness. At the Premier's table she was hurrying along the wet slippery pavement, regardless of darkness or rain, taking home her ill-paid needlework to buy this poor sick husband some coveted luxury. Nay, do not laugh at her. I like to think that even in this frivolous, worldly heart, something so true and beautiful as love could dwell.

Years ago D'Arcy had given her a photograph of Vivien; it had been sent to him from India, a shadowy, ill-taken little picture enough, but bringing out the noble, proud young face sufficiently to be a tolerably good likeness. Julie had had it copied in miniature by one of the first artists of the day; and she always wore it now, in an innocent-looking little pendant that nevertheless had a cunningly-wrought secret spring known only to herself and the jeweller who made it—a crafty old German, who found it worth his while to keep a great many secrets.

There was something repulsive to Vivien in this marriage when he heard of it; remembering Marion, and knowing Julie as he did. And the bad opinion he had formed of Lord Clowden seemed only to deepen the more he knew of him; he had

not seen him since his childhood, but judging him by report, he formed a pretty good guess at the man's character.

"I should think my father must have been just such another bad, selfish man of the world," he thought.

That father he had never seen, but whose selfish sin had clouded his whole life! And he would clench his hands passionately when he thought of him, possibly living happy and respected, while she, that poor broken-hearted mother, was sleeping in the cold grave. Why was it so? he would ask himself; why had she been chosen to bear so heavy a load? why had she not loved and married some good, kind man, such a husband as he would have made to the woman he loved? For he might have loved and married but for that father's curse.

All that was beautiful, all that was sweet and holy, he insensibly connected with that dear dead mother. She was a mysterious abiding presence in that strong, tender heart. He seemed to know her so well, to understand her so thoroughly—that proud, pure girl-heart, that was strong to bear anything but shame, and *shame* was the very weapon chosen to humble her to the dust. He revered all women for the sake of the love he bore her; a love that, perhaps, had more of ideal worship in it than he could ever have given to a living human being.

After poor D'Arcy's funeral, he crossed over to Boulogne and stayed at the old *château* for some time. It was the home of his mother's childhood, her sad, friendless childhood! He liked to fancy the sweet bright face peeping shyly through

the quaint mullioned windows; liked to fancy the restless little feet running softly down the long sombre corridors; how the lonely child might have nestled in that chair, or in this; and how the glad laughter, that even the still, ghostly old house surely could not chill, had woken merry echoes into its dismal stillness. He thought of her so, till had a little child-spirit haunted the unused rooms and claimed to be his mother, he would scarcely have started. One day, up in an old lumber-room, dusty and mildewed, he found a little shoe, a tiny, worn-out, ribbon-tied shoe; and he took it up with tender reverence, keeping it carefully all his life, his one relic of his mother's childhood.

One morning, among the letters forwarded from his club, Vivien noticed one in an entirely unknown hand, a delicate feminine

superscription; he had no lady correspondents except Carrie, so it was with some curiosity he read the following:—

“MY DEAR CAPTAIN STANLEY,—

“I am writing to beg a *very* great favour! Yesterday, at the Academy, I had the pleasure of seeing a picture of your curious old *château*; and you cannot think how fascinated I was with its quaint beauty. I quite envy you so picturesque a hermitage; but I daresay, from the very fact of its being your own, you don't value it half enough.

“There is really nothing I should like so much as the pleasure of staying there; and if you give me leave—as *I hope you will*—I shall run over to Boulogne for a week or two this summer!

“The hounds wont meet this year till

December 15th, when the Duke will be very happy to see you. With our kind regards,

“I remain,

“Ever yours sincerely,

“JULIE HAMPSHIRE.”

Vivien crushed the letter impatiently in his hand. What was this woman to him, that she should try perpetually to force herself on his notice? True, she was a coquette, but surely she had victims enough; surely the most insatiate vanity must have been satisfied with her daily triumph. She had almost fooled him once, and now, looking back on that time, he might well be pardoned for thoroughly despising her. That she had ever loved him, he did not believe; in the coldness of afterthought, he remembered that mad confession only as a

piece of perfect acting, a coquette's wiles to gain a heart that defied her power; and he thought with bitter shame that at one moment he was ready to give up his unsullied honour for the sake of this unprincipled spoiler, whose smiles were often the price of a deathless soul. And now he must leave his house because she admired it; for he could not refuse her request without positive rudeness, and Vivien had ever been courteous to her sex. So he wrote a polite little note, begging her make any use of the *château* she pleased.

As he looked at his mother's portrait that night, it reproached him.

"I have been selfishly idling here," he said. "I have not been seeking my father."

* * * * *

Boulogne had almost exhausted its gossip about Captain Stanley's hermit habits, and the dead letter-box his house was to those cordial little bits of pasteboard its *beau-monde* at first had showered on him, when he suddenly disappeared, and the little town rang with the news of the Duke and Duchess of Hampshire's arrival.

Julie was delighted with the place; that vain little woman was tiring already of fashion's homage, now that it was so secure; and she found the old *château* a delightful retreat from the frivolous noisy world.

She would wander alone in the grounds—that tangled, overgrown wilderness, where the sunlight could only creep slanting and quivering on the darkened pathways; and through the gloomy old house, losing herself in the winding corridors, and sit for

unheeded hours looking from the little deep-bedded windows, thinking dreamily, lovingly of Vivien, as she watched the perfect sea of tossing leaves.

She did not for a moment think it had been any sacrifice to him, giving up the *château*; so she had no scruple in accepting the perfect *carte-blanche* Vivien had given her; and she stayed there a great deal oftener than Clowden cared to stay, making the tower chamber her *boudoir*, and being childishly happy in the old place.

Clowden never complained openly; the old man had become a perfect slave to his new toy; and the hard, battered expression that had lately disfigured his face was fast passing from it. In a very pleasant corner of the garden of delusion he was dreaming his life away. He grew more doatingly fond of his wife every day.

We all know how good an antidote constant occupation is against heart-aches, great and small ; and Julie having no real work to do, from sheer restlessness invented a hundred pretty toils for her white hands. She would dress Clowden's study with fair flowers ; she would even dust his books sometimes, and work pretty slippers, that never by any chance could be made to fit him ; but still he was only too proud to receive them, treasuring them, and the memory of such like acts, in his fond foolish old heart. She would read to him, for those dark-grey eyes that had done such mischief long ago were sadly dimmed now ; she would sing to him, as she never sung in public, for her whole heart would go out in the melody, till she forgot the old man by her side, and still sang on, singing to the love that was her curse.

All she did, in spirit she did for Vivien ; and hating her husband, she was to him a loving wife—strange as it may seem—for *the sake of another man !*

This woman is no creature of my imagination ; with all her faults I put her before you as she was, confessing that I find her as difficult to understand as perhaps you do.

The world held her to be in nowise different to many of her fellows, only infinitely more beautiful ; but having lifted the curtain, and pryed into some of her secrets—secrets the world knows nothing of—I sometimes think in all the earth, the Evil One could find no fitter home than Julie Hampshire's heart.





CHAPTER VII.



IN his search for his father, Vivien sought no lawyer's help or advice. It seemed sacrilege to him, the very thought of making that poor mother's story the subject of conjecture and criticism.

In his instinctive delicacy of feeling, he shrank even from allowing Lady Evylin to read her letter; not that Carrie ever expressed any curiosity about it; but in her kind good heart she was *very* curious, and often wondered why Vivien guarded it so jealously. This much he did, though; he sought out the little French chapel, and proved that the marriage was perfectly

legal ; but having gone so far on the road to discovery, a sickening feeling of helplessness began to creep over him.

He had no clue to follow up ; nothing to trace that father by ; nothing to know him by, except a portrait taken in his youth—a portrait he might no more resemble now, than he himself did that fair-haired copy of his childhood Lady Evylin treasured so fondly.

He had almost fancied some instinct would point out the man to him ; but now all seemed so hopeless ; and a bitter, miserable despair began slowly to lay its chilling hand on his heart.

Before, when he had all the excitement of camp life, and lately, when he had D'Arcy to think of, he had put off this search into a hopeful future ; but now, brought face to face with it, he was surprised to think that he could ever have hoped.

His mother had sought that father ; and she, who knew him so well, had failed to find him ; what chance had he, who had never seen him ?

It was evident that his father had been a gentleman, socially speaking, and most probably a man of means ; how then had he hidden himself so completely ? At home and abroad, wandering restlessly, he looked eagerly for the name, *Vivien Stanley* ; but he never came across it. He had thought that name such a sure clue to his father, feeling certain that, when he had leisure to follow it up, it would prove successful. Strangely enough, it never struck him that his father had married under an *assumed* name.

Vivien had never deceived a woman in his life ; and he was not familiar with those petty deceptions that are thought no crime

when their guerdon is the price of a pure trusting heart.

He was not dead, he felt certain. Vivien was a fatalist ; that letter had said he should meet his father, and never for one moment did he give up the belief.

Some men endowed with such faith would have thought it useless to disquiet themselves with the despair he often felt in his vain search ; they would have been content to rest on the oars, and let their boat float placidly down the stream of life, catching at such fruit as they passed by, plucking such flowers as they could reach without trouble ; enjoying the present, and anticipating the future ; but idlers are not easily fashioned of such stuff as Vivien was made of.

Possessing great courage, indomitable strength of will, and crowning it all with an

honest tender heart, naturally that mother's command weighed on his mind.

She had told him to seek his father, and avenge her shame and sorrow—shame and sorrow alike unmerited! If he found that father, to the uttermost of his power he meant to follow out his mother's command, and *avenge her*.

He never planned his vengeance; he left the form it should take till the dark but longed-for hour, when he stood face to face with that bad, treacherous man.

His love for his mother was his religion; it made him noble, it kept him pure; but, like most fanatics, he was ready to make any sacrifice, to commit any sin for his idol. That gentle Christian woman who had brought him up had tried hard, but she had failed, to light the inner temple of this man's soul with the blessed brightness that

shone so in her own blameless life. How could the tender lesson of forgiveness preach to one who lived for revenge?

But Carrie carried this grief, like all others, to the foot of her heavenly Father's throne, and left it there, restfully. Dear, gentle woman-heart, I cannot doubt that thy prayer was answered—ay, even though at the eleventh hour!

This continual disappointment changed Vivien so, both mentally and physically, that Lady Evylin's kind heart ached when she saw him; and she bethought her of some plan to wean him from his present mad search, for *mad* she thought it, feeling certain that his father had died long ago.

He never quite neglected her, and always, no matter where he was, hurried home to spend Christmas in Park Lane.

They were sitting together one New Year's Eve, as you saw them once before, side by side in the red firelight, when Carrie proposed the plan that had long been nurtured in his absence.

"I want you to take me to Boulogne this winter; I should so like to see your *château*. Will you, my boy?"

He was still "her boy," that stalwart, soldierly man, with his grave, bearded face!

"I don't think *they* are there now," she continued, seeing him hesitate, and knowing his dislike both to Clowden and Julie. "When last I saw Clowden he talked of spending the winter at Rome."

"I shall only be too delighted to take you over, dear mother," he said, looking fondly at the sweet calm face, comely still, though the soft hair lay snow-white under her sombre window's cap. "But the *château*

is hardly mine now. I hear that when the Duchess is not staying there herself she gives her friends leave to view the place, as if it was a public museum. So, *petite mère*, I must cross over next week, and see if there is no one staying there now."

"Really, Vivien," Carrie cried, "you are most extraordinary. Why allow that woman to rob you of your house?"

"That is the penalty one must pay for knowing such a great lady," he said, laughing ironically.

A few days later he crossed the Channel. There were so few pleasures he could give "the little mother," and he had long wished to take her over the *château*; so he hastened to prepare the place for her reception.

He arrived at Boulogne on a chill snowy evening, and, feeling tired and cold,

ordered his dinner to be served in a private room. He was well known at the hotel, and had often exchanged a few friendly words with the *garçon* who now attended him.

Vivien had taken no notice of the man this evening—lately he had grown rather absent; so poor Jacques fidgeted about, till at last, tired of waiting for a remark and unable to keep silent any longer, he cried—

“Oh! it is a dreadful fire, and they say all the town engines wont be able to put it out!”

“A fire!” Vivien said, waking from his reverie. “Where?”

“At the English milord’s place, the Duke of Hampshire; the fire-engines have just dashed past, and——”

“A fire at the *château*, did you say?”

Vivien cried, starting up, his face full of horror and interest enough to satisfy even the garrulous waiter.

"Yes, monsieur; and the English Duke only arrived yesterday, with his beautiful lady, and a great many friends who had made up a tourist party."

"Get me a cab at once!" Vivien cried. "Tell the man (you will make him understand better than I shall), tell him I will give him twenty *napoléons* to take me to the *château* in as many minutes. Go—go at once!" And he fairly pushed the astonished waiter from the room.

"Holy saints! But he is mad!" the man thought; but he brought a *voiture de place* round in a moment, and diligently impressed on the driver the necessity of speed.

It seemed to last an age, that drive through the gas-lit town, over the hard

frozen ground, past the dark, bare, whirling trees and ghastly snow-white pasturage.

Burnt down! the dear old place he had loved so well! There might be loss of life, too! Good God! if the timber caught!

"Faster! faster!" he cried; and it seemed as if no horse ever went so slowly.

The whole scene was bright as daylight now—the red flames leaping heavenward, the black sky, the white earth, and that pale-faced crowd of crouching human beings!

As he sprang to the ground, high above the hissing fire, the cheering firemen, and noisy play of water, rose a human voice, so full of piteous agony that Vivien's blood chilled when he heard it.

"Let me go!" it pleaded. "Oh! for God's sake, let me go!" And then it changed into wild, fierce menace,—“Damn

you! Let me go, I say! Is she to be roasted alive while you devils play with me here?"

"Is any one in the house?" Vivien asked.

A dozen voices replied in wild, excited French. The poor gentleman thought his wife was there, but all had been saved—yes, *all!*

They were holding him back, poor old Clowden; and he struggled fiercely with his captors. He wanted to go into that mass of dancing flames, that burning, tottering house, in search of her—the light of his old age!

"*She is there*, I tell you!" he cried. "In the tower chamber! Oh! God, my Julie!"

He was so weak in the hands of those strong men using their kind force so cruelly,

and tears of agony rolled down his poor lined face.

Vivien came close to him. "I will save her, God helping me," he said; and the strong quiet words calmed the old man instantly. He struggled no more; a worthier champion than he was gone. He could trust the owner of that true hearty voice. So he stood, his hands clasped, his grey head bare to the chill night-wind, his eyes fixed in one long moveless stare on the high round tower, that stood like a strong black giant in the sea of flames.

Those who held him loosened their hold instinctively. Perhaps he prayed, that old atheist, in that solemn moment of anxious, yearning agony; or perhaps he trusted him who was gone—trusted him as a God!

Vivien asked for a rope; he was so calm now in action that he could wait to try its

strength. That one would not do ; so they brought him another—several others—he tried them all ; the one he chose must needs be strong for the weight of a human life. No one thought of dissuading him ; there was that in his face that chilled such words. They said afterwards “he looked like one who could save.”

Up those stairs ! Would they never end ? Stair upon stair ; hot, darting flame-tongues ; stifling columns of thick black smoke. His brain reeling giddily, his hands burnt and blistered, clinging to the scorching hand-rail.

Ah ! thank God, here was the door at last ! He groped for the handle, found it, turned it ; but the door refused to move. Great Heavens ! it was locked, and locked inside ! He beat on the oaken panels ; he cried to her to open it. Oh ! that

crashing, deafening uproar; he could hardly hear his own voice! His brow grew damp with agony; the hot flames flashed before his eyes; burst into life one moment, and then died away in heavy sickening darkness. He roused himself with a mighty effort, all his strength—oh! God, how weak he was!—against that strong, old oaken door. Once more; only once more! Steady—steady—the staples are wrenched from the rotten woodwork, and he staggers into the room.

That bright, scented, dainty *boudoir*; he takes it in at one glance. *She* is lying on the gilded velvet couch, her face buried in the cushions, her white hands clasped, shivering and moaning.

“Julie! my poor child, Julie!” he cries; and at the sound of his voice, so strong

and tender even then, she raises her face. Over its blanched terror sweeps a great change. Ay, in the very face of death she can rejoice at seeing *him*!

“You,” she says, rising and trembling, but not with fear now; “*you* have come to save me.” She put out one quivering hand and touched him, and the big eyes scanned his face full of tender, mournful passion. “You don’t know how I have longed to see you. Oh! Vivien, how you have changed!”

He broke in fiercely impatient—“This is no time for frivolity; in five minutes the tower will be in flame!”

She caught his hand.

“Look!” she cried, laughing hysterically, “look! we shall die together. Ah! you can’t escape me now!”

He turned; the red flames were dancing

over the fallen door, and the choking smoke filled the room.


“You are mad!” he cried, seizing the velvet cloth from a side-table, scattering the ornaments, broken where they fell; he wound it round her. Even then he was thoughtful; that strong rope he held must not cut the delicate fragile waist.

“Yes, mad!” she cried, “if it is madness to love you as I never loved before; madness to worship the very ground you tread on; to treasure up every word you ever spoke to me, cold enough though they were, God knows. Madness to feel my heart aching, aching heavily, wearily, year by year; and each moment in every passing day a year in pain. Longing for the very sight of you, as the starving long for food; as the traveller in a scorching desert might pine for one drop of cold, sweet water! If

this is madness, then I am mad. Why do you blame me? Is it my fault? If I could, don't you think I would not much rather love that wretched old dotard, my husband! You condemn me in your cold English prudery, because you cannot understand such love as mine. A heaven or a hell, I am not ashamed of it; I glory in it. It is an heritage, only to know such love as this!

"Oh! Vivien," she continued, big tears dimming those blazing eyes, "I would do anything to win your love; there is no degradation I would not sink to. Oh! my darling, my darling!" and she kissed those strong brown hands, trying to hinder him as he knotted the rope round her; but her tiny dainty fingers were powerless against the iron of his.

"Hush, Julie!" he said, and the pale



grave face grew very stern ; “ you are not a good woman ; you are not fit to die. If you hinder me like this it will be positive suicide, and murder too, for you are cutting off my last chance of escape.”

He threw open the window.

“ I am going to let you down ; will you do as I tell you ? ”

“ Save yourself ! save yourself ! ” she cried.

He threw back his head in angry impatience—

“ I came to save *you* ! ”

“ Kiss me once,” she pleaded, tremblingly, and the warm colour crept over her face and neck. She was not given to overmodesty, but her great love roused her womanhood.

“ Only once, Vivien,” grown bold by his silence and her own despair.

He was looking out into the black darkness below.

"It is a long way down ; you must not be frightened ; only hold tight." And he wound the rope round his arm.

"Kiss me once!" she cried, clinging to him.

He bent down hastily, pressing a quick, impatient kiss on her white brow ; and then, almost before she was aware of it, he had lifted her through the window.

"For God's sake hold fast," he cried, "and look up !"

Look up ! There was no fear of her looking down while *he* was there ; the pale, anxious face lit by the cruel, roaring flames, as hand over hand he let her down slowly but surely, she knowing nought of that perilous descent ; knowing nothing but that he was there ; seeing nothing but his haggard, beautiful face.

He stood there, all his tense nerves braced to guide that cord, till a hoarse cry from the crowd below told him she was safe. Then his bruised hands dropped from the blackened rope, and he fell backwards, downwards, into darkening space!





CHAPTER VIII.



ELDER, friendly hands were stretched out to receive Julie, quickly cutting the rope from round her. She had looked up, and held tight as Vivien bade her, but she had obeyed him mechanically,—clinging to the rope with unconscious hands, and looking up because he was there. But as her feet touched the ground, and that hoarse deafening shout went up, all the strained muscles relaxed, and she fell back in a dead faint.

Clowden caught her in his arms, striving to bear her away from that kindly, officious crowd; but her weight was too great

for the old man in his present state of nervous excitement, and he was obliged to allow a bystander to take her.

Most of the sufferers from that terrible fire had found refuge in Myrtle House, it being the nearest habitation to the ill-fated *château*, and the little hostess opened her doors wide on that sad night of terror. Happily none of the guests had suffered in any way beyond the shock of so sudden a catastrophe. The fire first breaking out in the kitchens, there had been ample time for escape before it spread.

They were gathered together in the bay-windowed parlour, a pale-faced, anxious group, many of them in full evening dress (it was about half an hour before dinner-time when the fire alarm was first given)—when the Duchess of Hampshire was carried in, pale and unconscious. Lucy had her

taken up to her own bedroom, and despatched her maid in all haste for a doctor.

Julie was lying on a sofa drawn up to the fire, when she beckoned Clowden to her side. He had been watching her recovery from that death-like swoon with yearning eyes, standing in the shadow, feeling helpless and anxious.

"You are better now, my darling?" he asked, bending tenderly over her.

"Where is he?" she asked, anxiously.

"Who?"

"Ah!" she cried, starting up and wringing her hands. "He said I was cutting off his last chance of escape. I have murdered him! Oh! God, I have murdered him!"

"Hush, my darling; who are you talking about?" Clowden said, trying to lead her back to the sofa; and the doctor, who was

following Lucy from the room, paused in the doorway.

"Oh! save him," she cried, seizing Clowden's hand. "Swear to me that you will go back and save him. He came to save me, and I kept him till it was too late. Perhaps he is burnt to death by now!"

She covered her face with both her hands, shrieking aloud at the horrible thought.

The doctor came back into the room.

"He is quite safe," he said, with a warning look at Clowden; "quite safe! I saw him myself but a moment ago. Will you lie down again, madam?"

"Do you know Captain Stanley?" she asked.

"*Mais oui!* Oh yes, madam," he answered, calling on the saints to forgive the lie.

“Was it Vivien who saved you, Julie?” Clowden asked.

“Yes—yes, it was Vivien!” she sobbed.
“Oh, thank God that he is safe!”


Clowden followed the doctor from the room.

“Where is he?” he asked.

“It was only a lie, monsieur. I said it to calm madam. I know nothing of the gentleman.”

Clowden left the house at once, walking back towards the *château*. The fierce, glaring, cruel flames lit the whole road like noonday. The firemen were still there, striving might and main to prevent the timber catching. They had given up the *château*, that was hopeless; it must burn down like a huge log; there was no saving it.

None of the crowd knew anything of the



brave gentleman, as they called Vivien. He had escaped, some said, and others thought he had perished in the fire. The *château* was literally wrapped in flames; nothing living could possibly be there.

* * * * *

In a darkened room a man lay dying—full of youth, full of beauty; lying there in all his crushed strength, helpless as an infant.

Dying! With the sun shining warm and radiant on the thawing frost outside; with the birds singing in the bare old trees he had loved so well; and the bright light of life and day pouring its beauty on that smouldering heap of ashes that had once been the old *château*. That time but a day before the *château* stood in all its pride—that time but a day before, that pain-wrought, scarcely breathing form had been a strong hale man.

Dying ! when kind eyes looked for his return ; when bright, tired eyes that loved him slept. Dying ! when with a prayer on his lips, all unused to prayer, an old man watched by his bedside.

The blinds were down, for the brightness of day pained those poor fading eyes. Had they been up, he could have seen from where he lay the piteous ruin of the old *château*,—the bare trees swaying in the wind left many a gap to mark its fall. Nothing but the tower was left. It still stood, high and defiant, though the disfigured window-holes were a weird preface to the desolation within.

The solid masonry had defied the flames, and it was perfectly hollow and empty, save for the stone staircase, that still spired upwards, corkscrew-like ; for the wooden flooring of the tower chamber had fallen in,

and down below, crushed among the *débris*, they had found Vivien but a few short hours since.

The cruel flames had not come nigh him, but his limbs were all horribly crushed and distorted ; lying there pale, and heavily inactive, at first they had thought it was a dead man. They had carried him to Myrtle House. Medical skill had done all in its power to alleviate his suffering, but the word had gone forth—the man's hours were numbered !

Clowden had offered to sit up with him ; Clowden had promised to call aid, if aid was needed. So through the grey dawning the old man watched, with sleepless, haggard, yearning eyes, by the side of his dying son.

What cruel irony of Fate had brought them together so ! Their lives had lain far.

parted ; and yet when the son lay dying, whose life he had never brightened, the father was there ; and his retribution was beginning unrecognised by himself, and unknown by his son.

He sat there silently watching him ; and the pale shadowy dawning passed away into the bright clear light of sunrise. He sat there longing feverishly for the dying man to speak, to recognise him ; longing to proclaim himself with an almost irresistible yearning ; longing for that wronged son's pardon as he had never longed for anything before.

Only once he had spoken, a whispered, impatient command to "shut out the sunlight," and Clowden had obeyed ; taking his seat again by the bedside ; watching that changed, haggard face, and those closed, quivering eyelids. And as the

sunlight crept in, the two faces grew into a strange likeness, the one altered in its anxious watchfulness, the other in its pain-stamped calm.

Vivien opened his eyes, and as they fell on Clowden a shadow of the old bright smile came back.

"She is safe?" he said; and Clowden's heart beat quicker, for he knew that he was recognised. He bowed his head, he had no words to answer the dying man; a dimness passed before his eyes; at that moment what was Julie compared to his son?

"Will you raise me a little?" he said. "Thank you, that will do," as Clowden raised the pillows under that poor heavy head.

"What is the matter with me?" he said, presently. "I feel so numbed and cold; I can hardly breathe. *Am I dying?*"

There was something in his face so anxious and haggard, that Clowden answered almost involuntarily in a choking sob—

“They say so.”

“Who say so?”

“The doctors.”

There was a smile on the dying man's face, bright and transient.

“They are wrong; I cannot die yet. Do you believe in fatality? I have work to do in this world, and I cannot die until it is accomplished.”

There was a great silence. Vivien closed his eyes. Those words, “I cannot die yet,” so confidently spoken, went home to Clowden's heart.

“Oh! God,” this atheist cried, “grant that he may live.”

It is in such moments of agony that we

recognise the need of an omnipotent God; all the proud science of earth fades before the grey cold barrier of death.

“Raise me a little,” Vivien said, “and I will tell you about it.”

Heaven knows why he chose to make a confidant of this man. He had never liked him; there had never been the slightest sympathy between them; but perhaps, in the face of that utter weakness that was so miserably creeping over him, some doubt of his boast, “I cannot die yet,” presented itself; and there is that in human nature that finds comfort in convincing another of the strength of a hope when it is beginning to fail us. It is strange that with our hand on a prop that is breaking under us, we should cling to it and cry, “See how strong it is!” But most men are true to their own delusions,

and you must remember that this fatality had been Vivien's creed.

Clowden raised him, pillowing his head on his own breast. He was very weak, that once strong man, and the laboured breath was painfully distinct. As Clowden wiped the dampness from his brow, it came back to him so vividly, that moonlit picture-gallery where he had first held Vivien in his arms. Only once before, and the man was his own son!

Who was to blame but himself for this? His son might have been all his own, loving him, honouring him, a dearer, nobler reflection of his own youth. Fate, as it were, had offered him that son in his early childhood, like a fair blank page, on which he might write an atonement for the bitter past. Fate had sent that son to him, possessing all that was calculated to touch

the hardest heart; sent him in all his childish beauty and pleading helplessness, and the little boy had stood at his father's heart and knocked in vain!

He had realised his responsibility, but he had flung it off. He had sacrificed his child mercilessly for the selfish gratification of his love for Marion. That he might possess her, he had crushed all sympathy for his own flesh and blood, and left that helpless baby to the mercy of strangers. Was Clowden to be thanked that those strangers had dealt kindly with the friendless waif? Had he done aught to brighten that son's childhood; aught to train his boyhood; aught to establish his manhood? All he had done for that son was to stamp him by a cruel lie, with the bar sinister of illegitimacy. And now, when atonement was too late, how his own

brutality rose before him in all its glaring hideousness.

Atonement was too late *now*; we can make no bargain with death; and yet Clowden's heart, selfish to the last, yearned even then for that injured son's forgiveness. But he *dare not* ask it. There was something in the proud dignity of that pallid drawn face that checked the yearning impulse to own himself; to say to that dying man whose mother he had cast on the world penniless and heartbroken, the man whose life he had blighted—

“I am your father!”

The father he had been taught to hate; the father to whom he owed no debt, but the heavy debt of retribution! He could not say it, the words trembled unuttered on his lips. He could only hold him up, bowed by the heavy weight of his colossal

frame, formidable even in its crushed strength. But the old man scarcely recognised the strain on his arms ; mechanically he braced his muscles to bear the weight, so great was his interest in Vivien's story ; opening, as it did, the sealed past ; unveiling, as it did, the mystery of Isabelle's life, from the dark hour he drove her from him.

"Of course you already know that I have no claim on Lady Evelylin," Vivien began, "beyond the claim she laid on herself when she adopted me. My poor mother and Lady Evelylin were schoolfellows, and to that fact alone, and her own kind heart, I am indebted for all the benefits I have received. You will think it strange when I tell you that I never even saw my father ; that I knew nothing of him except that he was a villain."

He paused from sheer weakness. Clowden wiped the death-damp from his brow. Yes, he was a villain; who need accuse him when his own heart thundered the words?

“When my poor mother was a mere child, a schoolgirl barely seventeen years old, he won her affections, and persuaded her to elope with him; then, growing tired of her, he cast her off, with the shameful, cruel lie that she was not his wife! Mark you,” he cried, his eyes lighting with excitement, “when he grew tired of her he did not desert her; he chose a safer, surer way of ridding himself of the woman he was weary of. He calculated, in his brutal cunning, on the effect such words would have on a proud, pure-souled girl; and he chose the very weapon he knew would sever her for ever from him. He had no woman of the world to deal with—simply an innocent,

trusting child, whom the bare fact of his cruel words, that she was not his wife, roused into fleeing from *him*. He was safe then, no law could touch him; his wife had left him; he was freed for ever from his hated burden; and my poor mother was cast on the world."

The flash died from his eyes, but no passion could have cut Clowden's heart so effectually as the perfect scorn with which he mentioned him—all the utter contemptuous hate of years rung in these faintly-spoken words.

"I have been reminded that the man was *my father*, as if I owed him any love for *that* fact! Why, the very workhouse where I was born was kinder to my mother than he was; it at least offered her the shelter he denied."

"Were you born in a workhouse?"

Clowden cried. His son's words were stabbing his heart, but that fact stabbed his pride, and pride had ever been the basis of that bad selfish man's character; and now pride cried out in its paltry hurt, where love—and he did love Vivien—was dumb.

“My mother was picked up fainting in the streets, penniless and friendless—where else could she find a home?”

He said this impatiently; the interruption fretted him; with his breath failing, and that strange, cruel numbing weakness creeping through every limb, moments were precious, and needless waste of breath, painful.

“There was a lady who was very kind to my poor mother while she was in the work-house, and she so won on her heart that she made a confidante of her. This lady had a brother in the law, to whom she

showed my mother's marriage certificate, and he pronounced it *perfectly legal*. My father had lied cruelly.

"My poor mother searched for that man, when she knew that he was really her husband, for my sake, but she failed to find him. When she lay dying she left that charge to me, *to find my father*. She said she was sure we should one day meet; and I believe we are fated to meet. I believe it so surely that I know I shall not die until I have seen him.

"You are very kind," he said, gently, "to hold me up. I am afraid I am dreadfully heavy. I think if you put that sofa cushion under my head I could lie nicely; I must lie high, my breath catches so strangely."

Clowden fetched it, rearranging the pillows: of a truth that heavy weight had

been almost too much for him. He sat down again a little in the shadow, feeling a painful pleasure in being near that un-owned son—wishing, with unavailing self-reproach, that he could undo the bitter past—thinking of that evening at Doolington Hall, when he first held Vivien in his arms, wondering now how he had steeled his heart against his child.

Vivien's thoughts were still with the past.

“My poor dear mother!” he said, faintly, “how vividly she comes back to me to-day. She was so patient, so good, so gentle! Had you known her, you would have wondered how the brute could live who broke her heart! I often wonder what manner of man he was, to drive a mere child out into the world. *He* must have known what the world was. Do you think such a monster could have lived happily?”

"Oh no!" Clowden said, in a choking voice; "he did not live happily."

"He was my mother's murderer!" Vivien said, sullenly. "She died of *starvation* when I was only five years old. Even now I can remember the cruel, bitter, lonely life she led. In the midst of bright, happy fellow-creatures we were as isolated as though the crowded streets had been a wilderness. Hand in hand, the cold piercing to our very hearts, we wandered about in the frosty winter time—wandered through the streets, because our bare garret was too cold to sit in, and a fire a luxury we dare not think of. What that time must have been to her—a delicate, refined woman! I was a child, and she surrounded me with all the brightness she could, poor darling! and yet it comes back to me, so full of horrible misery and privation!

"I know that much as I felt the cold, I was warmer clad than she was; that hungry as I often was, she would give me food that she denied herself. And now, after sharing all that meagre misery that slowly drained her dear life, I find myself possessor of fifteen thousand a year! That money my mother was heiress to. My father took her, you perceive, from a wealthy home to drive her out into the cold hard world, disgraced and a beggar!"

"Oh! God forgive me," Clowden cried;
"I am your father."

It was a yearning cry of self-reproach wrung from his hard cruel heart, wrung from him in spite of himself.

With a quick spasmodic start, Vivien answered him in the one word—

"You!"

Who is it who compared death to a

burnt-down candle? Life flashed in those passionate eyes, bright and startling. Life came back to those nerveless hands; as he spoke he grasped the sheet, tearing it through in one long rent. Then, like the sudden flame of a dying candle, his recovered strength left him weaker than before, and the man's spirit succumbed to the man's weakened body, and he lay back quite still.

Clowden sat there, lost in the past; his face buried in his hands; the heavy tears slowly trickling through his clasped fingers.

Vivien's voice startled him, breaking the stillness; the voice was low and faint, the disjointed words were painfully distinct.


"In the breast-pocket of my coat."

Clowden rose at once; the coat lay on a chair; he felt in the breast-pocket, and found a leather miniature case: long ago,

in the golden summer of his life, he had held that miniature case before. He put it in Vivien's hands ; his eyes were shut, but his hand closed firmly over it.

He had obtained the one wish of his life ; the aim of his life he had called it—he had at last found his father ; but it had come too late ! It is often so, a bitter satire on the great importance we attach to our frivolous human hopes, that the wish of a lifetime comes to a dying man. Be it the bright angel of fame, love, or wealth ; comes when the heart is too faint to rejoice, when the hand is too weak to grasp it ; comes to be met by the gaunt black shadow that says, "Stand aside, for he is *mine*."

Vivien opened the miniature case. There was the sweet loved face of his dear dead mother ; there was the thin closely-written paper of his dead mother's letter. So he



had always kept them, safe and together, his relics of the past. He held the letter to Clowden.

"Her letter," he faintly whispered.

He pressed the portrait to his lips in one long fervent kiss. He seemed to grow weaker suddenly, for the hand that held it dropped heavily to his side, and the miniature fell unheeded to the ground, shattering the ivory.

All the old familiar sweetness came back to his lips as he whispered. Clowden bent to hear the words.

"Mother, dear mother, after all these weary years."

"Oh! my son, my son, say that you forgive me," Clowden cried in agony. He laid his hand on Vivien's; his hot tears fell on the dying man's cold face.

"Oh! my son, my son!"

The fingers of the hand he held closed firmly over his for one brief moment; and the father saw a change, swift and terrible, pass over his face—the grey cold shadow of death!

Was that hand-clasp *forgiveness*, or was it the death struggle?





CHAPTER IX.



ALL Boulogne was roused by the catastrophe of the *château* fire. Old and young, rich and poor, men and women, all haunted the smouldering ruins. Visits of condolence and offers of timely assistance crowded in upon the sufferers, who, with the exception of Clowden and Julie (who were staying at Myrtle House), had taken up their temporary residence at one of the town *hôtels*.

Many of the English residents called on Lucy, but she was too much engaged to see them; and they were met at the door by the sad intelligence of Captain Stanley's

death, and the Duchess of Hampshire's illness.

While the busy world outside talked in wonder, in sorrow, or in pity, Clowden sat in the darkened house, surrounded by the world of his own past; sat with Isabelle's letter in his hand; sat reading those trembling weary lines of the dead woman he had wronged, under the roof of the living woman whose youth he had blighted.

Only a few moments back Lucy had entered that very room; he had not recognised her. What connexion could there possibly be between that gentle faded lady and the rosy dimpled impulsive child, who had loved him long ago! She had come in her tender womanly sympathy with news from the sick-room, bidding him throw off all anxiety, for his wife had quite recovered from the feverish symptoms she had shown

in the early morning, and that she was now sleeping calmly. He had thanked her in courteous gratitude, and she had flitted away, intent on some household duty; leaving him to the dark memories of the past, and his own unavailing self-reproach.

The past! So speedily lost, and yet in its early promise so lasting. Had he thought then of the darkness of an old age embittered by hopeless remorse! How eagerly he had embraced the spurious wisdom of tortured science; the philosophy that would make man but clay, fashioned by chance and unanswerable for a soul's eternity—that deems all homage to a Maker below the mental endowment of a reasoning being.

He had accepted the pernicious doctrines of those founders of ancient schools, whose grand intellect, perverted by egotism, had tried to storm the sacred citadel of truth,

because the blessed story of a Saviour's love had seemed all too simple for his earthly pride; he had wandered awhile in the dark mazes of their weird imagination, and ended by becoming an *Atheist*; believing nothing, fearing nothing, in the bright morn of his youth, laughing to scorn all duty to God and his fellow-man.

He had lived for *himself*, and in that all was told—his selfishness, his careless cruelty, and his sins. He had lived an easy, sensual, Sybaritic life; affecting the *blasé* cynicism of later years, wrapping himself in a cloak of egotism until he had numbed and stifled all his nobler feelings, hardened his heart, and debased his character.

The man had not been made for idleness; that strong will, those fierce passions, would have found vent in constant brain-engrossing work had wealth not come to

him as a birthright, and he did not possess the genius that can carve a path for itself. Riches had indeed been Clowden's curse; all the strong vitality of his nature needed occupation, and he had thrown himself heart and soul into worldly pleasure.

With the down yet on his lip he had proved every extravagance of fashion, and found himself a *roué* at heart while yet a boy in years; all the bright fresh charm of youth gone for ever before time had traced a single line on his unclouded brow. Then, weary and cynical, he had travelled far and near, seeking pleasure as the alchemist seeks for the precious principle that is to multiply and make gold.

In his wanderings he had met Isabelle D'Almez. Here was a new sensation for this *blasé* worldling of three-and-twenty—genuine admiration! Never before had he

seen woman so beautiful. Graceful with all Nature's innate ease, every movement captivating in its unstudied harmony, the perfect contour of the long lithe form would have entitled her to beauty, even had the face been less bewitchingly lovely. That sweet dusk face, mobile in its constant fascination, was a poem brilliant with wit, and glorified by love. With all the consummate art of which he was master he had tried to win her love, and succeeded.

After having won her under an assumed name, he had shrunk from owning the deception he had practised. He had had his own theories of love, and it seemed to him, that trust once broken, the delicate subtle charm of romance can never again be felt. This girl idolised him; why stand before her as a *liar*? Some day he would

tell her his real name; but not now, not while love was so sweet and new. His jaded heart had hugged this romance, fearing as only those who have once been *blasé* can fear the loss of that mysterious sympathy without which the fondest love is only friendship. As Vivien Stanley he had won her love, and in the name of Vivien Stanley he married her.

No horrible thought of future treachery had entered his heart as he stood by her side in the little French chapel. That deception, begun perhaps in the paltry pride of birth, had been kept up solely from the morbid fear of losing her heart-whole, trusting love. He had proved how rare such love was, and he valued it then with all a miser's jealousy.

How sweet after the weary formalities of fashion had been their sunny nomadic life,

with a companion whose every mood changed but to meet the sympathy of his own; now bright with all the resistless gaiety of her own laughter-loving race; now pensive with a tender romance that could tame even his rough temper. He did not understand music; such natures as his seldom do, but the wondrous melody of her voice never failed to enter his heart and leave its echo there. In all things she was a companion such as he had never met before. It was not true that he had wearied of her; satiety had not yet cursed his love; it was simply his temper, so brutal in its excess, so speedily roused, that had wrecked her life.

Laodice Crispin, *danseuse* at Her Majesty's Opera, had reigned, by right of her coarse animal beauty, over the small world of dissipation. Her bold blue eyes and glit-

tering hair were not without a certain charm, and she was wont to queen it in right royal fashion, choosing her victims at her own will. Very much as an Eastern despot might have selected some new importation from the slave market, she had chosen Clowden, then a mere youth at college; flattered him to the top of his bent, and subjugated him, for the time, rapidly and completely.

Often those who make a mockery of love find their greatest curse in really loving. It was so with this woman, who had lured men into loving her, and then laughed as she drove them from her, penniless and ruined, out into the shadow of despair. She herself loved at last, and she did not know how much she loved Clowden until he had cast off her allegiance for ever. Guided by her love, she had traced him to

Altenah, and it was only by the most extravagant promises that Clowden had prevented her from shattering the airy fabric of his happiness by telling Isabelle, with all the exaggeration of jealousy, the deception that had been practised on her.

Returning from the weary work of soothing the jealousy of a woman he hated, he had been met by passionate reproaches from the woman he loved. Unreasonable as it was, he had felt indignant with Isabelle for accusing him of the attention he had paid another woman solely to save her happiness. And it was scarcely strange that his fierce undisciplined temper, already irritated by the coarse vindictive jealousy of a vain, underbred woman, should have burst the slight trammels of self-control.

Had he not been blinded by passion he would have seen that a little tenderness

could easily calm the summer storm of Isabelle's temper. In all her flushed brilliant beauty she stood there, accusing him with more of a child's petulance than an outraged woman's anger. As a roused drunkard might have seized the first weapon that came to hand, so he had flung those cruel, lying words at her—

"You are not my wife!"

No sooner had the hasty, passionate words left his lips than he would willingly have recalled them. The haggard misery of that pallid, changed face; the horror of those widely-opened eyes, proclaiming that the taunt had gone home too surely. It was no longer an angry child who confronted him; but a pale, wan woman, aged for ever by that blow dealt in anger's brutal instinct.

How the words came back to him now,

the hard, dry voice that slowly cursed him—

“As there is a just God in heaven, you will one day suffer, as I now suffer. From my broken heart I curse you!”

Those words had repulsed his repentant longing for reconciliation, and he had left the room in anger. From that hour he had never looked on Isabelle again, till he stood by the calm dead figure at the Doolington Arms.

That girl whose heart had been like a flower, opening to the sun's rays, but drooping with the first cloud; that petted, spoilt, proud young spirit—Ah! he who had known her in her gay bright youth, could well realise how she must have suffered, by the dreary misery of that letter. The hard, cold, pitiless world had treated her very ill; as the weak are ever treated in life's great

battle, crushed down by the strong, their faint frail cry for help lost in the din of victory; lost till the last great day, when it shall rise to heaven a witness against you, Babylon !

At first he had thought her leaving him was but a mere burst of anger, and that she would return; so he had stayed at Altenah several weeks in the vain hope of seeing her again.

He had never rejoiced in his freedom till he saw Marion, six years after, and then he found no difficulty in persuading himself that Isabelle was dead, his repeated efforts to find her being so unsuccessful. Had she returned in the first agony of his repentant anxiety, there might yet have been happiness between those two; but those six years had dulled his self-reproach, and taught him forgetfulness; and in Marion he saw

the ideal woman he had long dreamt of—beautiful, pure, and holy.

The love of such a man as Clowden, to be lasting, must always contain a certain amount of veneration; that worship due only to the Supreme he lavished on her, shrining her for ever in his heart.

It was partly his own delusion, partly that he did not understand her, and partly the calm sweetness of manner that every one admired her for, that won for Marion this dower of perfect love.

She possessed neither Isabelle's brilliant beauty nor sparkling wit; the plain-spoken world would have called her soft features and *Madonna*-like expression insipid by the side of that sweet, dusk, mobile face; and yet his poor wronged wife could never have won such perfect unchanging affection.

Isabelle faded away, like the memory of

a plaything he had long since tired of, and Marion took her place—gracious, dignified, the woman he delighted to honour, the wife he would be proud of.

But that love, bought at the price of his treachery to his poor little son, had it prospered? Was it meet that it should prosper? He thought of those parted fourteen years; he thought of D'Arcy's untimely death.

Then a smile chased the haggard sorrow from his face, for across the dark chaos of the past flashed the bright light of the present—the fair young face of the wife of his old age. The past was gone for ever; he would bury its last reproach in Vivien's grave. Why torment himself with unavailing remorse?

A bright fire burned in the grate, and he crushed poor Isabelle's letter in his hand

and threw it on the flames. That fragile paper should never more accuse him, and with it he would forget his sin. Though the past held a shadow, the future should yet be bright.

He felt an irresistible longing to look on his lost son once more; so he entered the darkened room softly, where the dead man lay. The wintry sun crept faintly, in slanting rays of light, through its chill silence, marking in cold awful distinctness the outlines of that quiet, breathless form.

And there, looking on the passionless, beautiful, waxen face, so like, and yet so terribly unlike what he was, stood a woman—a woman from whose lustreless haggard eyes fell no tears, and from whose pallid lips escaped no moan.

She stood there, a living woman, by a dead man's side; her whole soul bound in

bondage as still as his ; not a muscle moving, not one warm pulse of life astir, only the soul stunned and horrified, looking from those dull widely-opened eyes.

A warm wrapper fell loosely round her, its vivid colour contrasting the pallor of her face; her soft brown hair hung dishevelled. She neither heard him open nor close the door.

He cried aloud in his astonishment—

“ Julie ! ”

“ Who is that ? ” she asked, in a low monotone, pointing to the bed. “ It cannot be Vivien ; he was so young, he was so strong, he could not die yet, could he ? ”

Clowden started at the weird vacancy of her strange smile.

“ Who is it ? ” she cried, impatiently ;
“ who is it ? ”

“ Come away, my darling,” he said, gently.

She laid her hand on the dead man's icy brow.

"So cold!" she murmured. "Oh! my love, my love!"

"Come away, Julie," Clowden cried, harshly; "you are not well; you don't know what you are saying. Come away; if any one sees you here, they will talk about it. Come away—he was nothing to *you*."

She flung off the hand he had laid on her arm; there was no pallor now in that beautiful stormy face; no want of lustre in those blazing angry eyes; the whole woman woke to life, quivering with passionate excitement.

"Let them talk!" she cried; "let the whole world talk. If it had ten million tongues to flaunt my shame, what could it say but that I loved the noblest, best of men? Is love a sin? Can we will our

love? Do you think that I am an automaton—a puppet to be led by the cold world's scorn—a machine without feeling—that I must lose *all*, and not cry out in my agony? *He is dead.* Oh, God! and they will bury him—*him*, my darling!—and it was only yesterday he kissed me—only yesterday I felt his arm round me, so full of life and strength! You do not know how I clung to him, and begged him to let me die with him—ah! death *so* would have been sweet! The bitterest death with him would have been preferable to life with you. I hate, despise—I loathe *you*——”

He had listened to her so far, strangely, awfully calm, only putting his hand out to the nearest chair with a vague helpless movement, and leaning on it heavily; but the last insult roused him; his eyes flashed, the colour came to his thin cheek, to his

pallid lip. With a low, hoarse cry he dashed the chair from him, and caught her arm, crushing it painfully.

She shrank back, every nerve quivering with terror, for his face, bent down to hers, was altered so by sudden passionate hate, that it looked scarce human; the incarnate devil of murder glared in those convulsed swollen features, and in those gleaming dilated eyes.

It was an awful, a terrible sight, and the woman who had braved the storm trembled at her handiwork. Thrice those foam-clothed lips tried to speak, and thrice the words died away in guttural inarticulate sounds. Then a ghastly change passed swiftly over his face, dragging one side down, eye and mouth, fixed as if wrought in blue-black marble; and he fell

forward heavily, suddenly dragging her with him to the ground.

One breathless moment of frozen horror, and then the warm quick blood of life returned to her veins, and she sprang up, wrenching her bruised white arm from that quivering paralytic grasp, and ran shrieking from the room.

Leaving him there—a ghastly, fearful wreck; alive, yet lacking life's vitality; dead, yet without death's holy calm. There, by *his* side, the son she had dedicated from his birth to be her avenger!

Surely, Isabelle Stanley, you were avenged!





CHAPTER X.

MYRTLE HOUSE was full from garret to basement; there were doctors and nurses, who came to be useful; and relations who came out of curiosity, and who were only in the way. They stared at the poor old paralysed man until the novelty had worn off, and then they fell to petting his wife.

“Poor child!” They all agreed “that it was a dreadful shock for her, and they did not wonder that she shrank from so ghastly a sight.”

“Your Grace must not agitate yourself,” the fashionable doctors said. “All that

medical skill can do is being done, but we cannot allow you to see our patient just yet."

So Julie found many to shield her in her selfish neglect of her helpless husband. She would weep and sigh, drawing her soft fair face into a mournful expression, that became her well; fancying herself a martyr, and making every one sympathise with her. And of a truth it was herself she pitied, herself she felt for; no anxiety, no sorrow, for her stricken husband ever found a moment's place in her bad selfish heart.

And he—that speechless wreck, what were his thoughts as he lay powerless and incapable of movement, through the long, long day! Only the left hand had escaped that cruel numbness, and it was weaker than the hand of a little child. What

passed in the tortured mind as it gleamed in dumb horror from his poor dull eyes !

Was *this* the future he had promised himself when he read that letter from the grave? Was this the man, who, defying his God, had deified himself; carrying all responsibility no higher than his own selfish love of pleasure, and crushing down all that interfered with his easy, callous, Sybaritic life.

He had argued that man may make life what *he* will; that starting fair, the barque of life well stored with wealth and wealth's accessories, he may steer clear of every breaker, shut out the sight of every storm, unfurl his sails to every pleasant wind, and so pass smoothly through the sea of mortality.

He had lived up to this selfish creed; diligently, carefully he had obeyed its

promptings ; and what had he gained ? He had sold himself for nought, sold his eternal soul for worldly ease and pleasure ; and what had he gained ? Verily, verily, sin is a hard taskmaster.

Although there were so many staying at Myrtle House, ostentatiously there for his sake, he would have been very lonely but for little Lucy. The hired nurses would gossip together ; the doctors would be away ; the friends would be comforting Julie.

Then Lucy would steal into the sick-room, and find him all alone. She would talk so gently to him of that precious hope that was hers ; she would tell him all the glad story of a world's redemption ; that tender, beautiful story, that had seemed all too simple for a man's belief.

She would take her little marked Bible,

and read to him of that dear Saviour who came to seek and to save *only* those that were lost. It soothed him, all this gentle, child-like faith; and by degrees the blank horror left his eyes, and they would light up strangely at the sight of her.

One day she knew he recognised her, for his weak left hand held hers, and feebly drew off the little ring, those two bright jewelled hearts he had given her long ago. He pointed to the window; she opened it, thinking he wanted the freshness of the outer air; but he made a motion with his hand and the ring, and then she knew that he wished her to throw it out. She did so, throwing it far. She let it go, without one regret, that memory of the brief bright past; it was meet that it should go, for in her sober middle age she had found a greater treasure, and Lucy's heart was with

that treasure, for ever in the keeping of her God.

And they were together, hand in hand, in the twilight, the old paralysed man and the faded woman who had loved him. And the silence was so intense and unbroken, that Lucy, all unconsciously, wearily bowed her head on the hand she held; and they both slept. And while they slept, his poor bound spirit passed away, into the presence of the God who gave it.

Who can tell what pardon met the erring sinner there? Who dare mark a boundary to the mercy of Omnipotence?

And Lucy, who had loved him so, did not sorrow as one without hope.

* * * * *

So they buried Clowden, Duke of Hampshire, in the family vault; and no

eye mourned him, save the little gentle faded woman, whose youth the storm of his love had blighted. They laid him in cold state by the side of Marion, Lady Clowden Strafford.

And Julie Hampshire still lives; still leading men captive by her rare beauty; still standing high on the list of fashionable Belles—leading, seemingly, a gay, happy life. Where is retribution? many would say; but I think a day will come when even she will answer for her sins; or perhaps you would think she was already punished, could you peep beneath the surface gaiety of her manner; could you watch her when she is alone, when no eye can see the bright fascination fade from her lips, or watch the great weariness in her haggard eyes, as she gazes on the strong, dark, pictured face of Vivien Stanley.

She wears the little locket that holds it, always hidden in her bosom; and its tiny weight presses on her aching heart, often when the false smile on her lips is sweetest, and the brilliant light of feigned joy beams topaz fire in her long soft eyes.

You would scarcely know this woman, the fame of whose insolent beauty rings far and near, could you see the agony of love with which she presses kisses on the pictured lips, lips that never in life met hers; could you see the haggard, piteous pain, that stamps out all her beauty, and hear the passionate eloquence, the intense yearning of that reiterated cry—

“Oh! my love, my love!”

And every year she visits the little French town where he died, only to shower fresh flowers on the ground that covers him,

only to read with a sorrowing, empty, aching heart the marble tablet that tells when and how he met his untimely end.

Surely there is retribution in this unavailing love; and that not among all the men who follow her footsteps, happy even to touch her hand, brave and good though some of them be, can she find one to take the place in her heart that dead man scorned to occupy.

So let her move, a bright star in society's firmament. After enjoying the pageant before the footlights, why sadden ourselves behind the scenes?

There is another who fondly treasures the memory of Vivien Stanley—Lady Evylin. Such a dear old lady she has become, with her sweet kindly face and soft silvery hair.

Hung on the dining-room wall in the little house in Park Lane are two oil paintings, very precious to the gentle old lady. One a bright-faced, dark-eyed boy, with soft clustering fair hair—the resolute saucy mouth, and sturdy grace of limb, winning a second glance from the most careless stranger.

Carrie looks at this one always first, with a mist in her soft blue eyes; then she passes on to the other. The same face, but matured in its calm decision, and manhood has darkened the hair to a rich brown—a handsome, noble, soldierly face. And the old lady says tenderly—

“My dear son, Vivien! My dear son!”

She passes most of her time in this dining-room; and to those who visit her

she tells how good, and noble, and brave he was, "her dear son Vivien."

In default of Vivien's dying childless, his uncle had willed his fortune to a monastery hard by ; so the hoarded wealth passed into holy hands.

The good monks were grateful enough after their own fashion, and I trust the masses sung for his soul brought peace to the guilty spirit of Ferdinand De Chambrau.

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve, nearly a year after Clowden's death, and Lucy, sitting alone by her fireside, thought of Mathew Palmer, wondering why his usual letter had not come ; for these two had a habit of always exchanging the compliments of the season ; once, and once only in all the long

year, did Lucy address a letter to Mathew ; and so thinking of him, she raised her eyes, and gave a little cry of surprise, for there was Mathew standing in the doorway !

“How strange !” she laughed, as she gave him her hand. “Why, I was just thinking of you, and wondering why you had not written !”

“As I sat down to write, you came back to me so vividly, Lucy, that I threw down my pen ; and here I am instead of my letter !”

Looking down on her, there in the gas-light, how fair the little flushed face looked in his fond eyes !

“Lucy,” he cried, impulsively, “I have come for a Christmas gift ; I can’t live without it.—Don’t answer me yet, darling ; listen to me for a few moments. I know that your love was given away before I first asked

you to be my wife. I have thought over it a good deal lately, and I can well understand how constant your heart must have been by my own constancy. But *now*, dear, do you think it right and acceptable in God's sight to bury your heart in the grave, when the living need it so? As I verily believe that all needful sacrifice is welcome to the Lord, so I think, darling, that we can obey and please Him by accepting the happiness he offers us. And I think that when we can be happy together it is *wrong* to deny ourselves that happiness. You may not think so now, but I am sure you would be happier as my wife; I love you so perfectly, my darling. — I have prayed for years that you may one day be mine; and do you know, Lucy, there have been times when I have almost *doubted*, for this unrequited love seemed so hard to bear."

There was a bitter pain in his voice, in his heart, making the good kind face quite haggard as he made this confession.

“ Oh ! forgive me, Mathew,” Lucy cried ; and, covering her face, she wept bitterly. It was so dreadful to think that *she* had such power over the man by her side—he a priest of God, and her earthly love to come between him and his Master !

He dropped her hand, and paced the room. He did not try to hush her sobs ; he did not say one word to soothe her self-reproach. All the old fond love was battling fiercely in his heart, and he strove to conquer it, as he had often tried before in his lonely home. He paced that room, forgetful of her presence, the woman whose name even was music to his heart.

She rose up and laid her hand gently on his arm, and the dull pain left his eyes as

they met hers, so sweetly mistily blue, upturned in the gaslight.

"Mathew," she whispered, "I will be your wife."

He caught her to his heart. He laid his hand on the fair head, resting so peacefully on his breast.

"Oh! Father," he said, "*for this* and all Thy mercies I thank Thee."

And then he kissed her—his own, his very own, at last.

* * * * *

The crocuses were just peeping prettily from the ground, like doves from a buried ark, to learn tidings of the tardy spring, when a wedding took place—a wedding so quiet that even Boulogne, busybody that she is, knew nothing of it until it was over.

The sunshine of youth had passed over
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both bride and bridegroom, but the sunshine of a happy wedded life abided with them. The bridegroom looked at the bride's face, as he crossed the threshold of the house of God, out from its sombre stillness into the bright flooding sunlight; he saw not the busy passing throng; he looked at his bride's face, and in his eyes all the old sweet beauty beamed again, as though its faded calm had been but a veil.

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